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WILL-O'-THE-WISP.

THE CALIFORNIA TROOPER.

BY FREDERICK H. DEWEY.

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WILL-O'-THE-WISP, THE CALIFORNIA TROOPER

CHAPTER I.

POUNCING UPON THE PREY.

"Do you anticipate hot work to-night, Will-o'-the-Wisp?"

The person addressed by this singular *sobriquet* was a well-built, muscular man of about five and twenty, handsome and resolute-looking. He was dressed in a coarse hunting-shirt of green, with pantaloons and hat to match, of the same marked color. He was mounted on a sturdy chestnut horse which he guided with the easy grace of a practiced, accomplished rider, and which, as he ambled along with arched neck and flowing mane, seemed proud of his handsome young master.

Behind this model horseman, rode a dozen bronzed and hardy-looking men of various ages, but all were clad in the same hue as their leader—green throughout. They were all well armed, and all bore similar weapons, (with the exception of the leader, by whose side jingled a trenchant saber)—a brace of revolvers, a knife, and a short carbine slung at the back; and the accustomed observer would at once pronounce them an organized band, and on no peaceful mission.

Such was the case. The storm of war was rolling over California—the war which was to wrest that richest of States from its Mexican possessors, to augment the rapidly-increasing territory of the United States, and to swell its coffers with the millions upon millions of treasure which lurked undiscovered under its snowy mountains.

While thus important to the United States, this war, aside from its connexion with the Mexican war, and the rich treas-

ure it opened to the Americans, is not prominent in history. No vast and magnificent armies, led by veteran generals of wide repute, trampled over California's beautiful hills and valleys; no rapacious brigades of gaudy cavalry swept over the plains; no regiments of ponderous artillery thundered their ominous echoes from peak to peak; the entire war was a desultory contest, a sort of extensive skirmish between American marines, hastily collected ramblers, a few regular soldiers, and a motley gathering of Mexican regulars, and chance native Californians who took the field out of no love for the Mexican standard, but to protect their homesteads from the ruthlessness of a reckless, rampant American soldiery.

The warfare, as said, was desultory and partisan. Men of local influence, out of love for excitement, or patriotism, organized small bands from among their friends or servants, and arming themselves as their vagrant fancies dictated, they styled themselves by some dashing *sobriquet*, and clattered among their hills and valleys seeking similar hostile bands, with whom they had but recently been on terms of amicableness and intimacy.

Roland Haywood's party was of this class. He was the proprietor of an extensive and rich rancho in the San Joaquin valley, and upon the declaration of hostilities he had formed a few of his more trusty employees into a squad, and in the manner of a feudal baron had taken the field as an irregular, independent and wholly irresponsible soldier—in fact a guerrilla.

Haywood was daring and remarkably crafty, and soon gained considerable local repute. He was often sought by powerful hostile bands, as his incursions, forays and skirmishes were invariably attended with success; but he eluded the most cunning with such marvelous dexterity, such admirable skill, that, in deference to his craft in baffling pursuit and evading captivity, friends and foes alike in sheer admiration had bestowed upon him the complimentary *sobriquet* of Will-o'-the-Wisp.

He had a single subordinate officer, who, notwithstanding he was second in command, had no nominal rank. He was Haywood's foreman in peace, and assistant in war; and

Joseph Otis was well adapted to second so dashing a trooper as Roland Haywood, Will-o'-the-Wisp.

He it was who spoke the words with which these pages are ushered in. The band was *en route* at dead of night toward an adjacent rancho (San Rafael) to surprise a band of Californians under one Marcos Alvarez, who had taken shelter there for the night.

This band had recently committed depredations upon Haywood's rancho, San Miguel, and as it was noted for its desperate valor, and as it was liable to become an easy prey, Haywood could not resist the double temptation of revenging the violation of his private property, and adding another sprig to his laurels.

It was in reference to this proposed surprise that Otis asked, as he rode by Haywood's side :

"Do you anticipate hot work to-night, Will-o'-the-Wisp?"

"If all is right—no," was the reply. "According to Moore and Randal, our scouts, Alvarez and his men are quietly sleeping at San Rafael without a solitary sentinel on guard. No doubt Alvarez fancies himself secure ; but did he know or dream that Haywood's Greens are close upon him, I'll warrant he'd soon change his mind. We must let no opportunity escape us, Otis, for securing Marcos Alvarez, for we may never again have so excellent a chance."

"How many men did the scouts report were under Alvarez?"

"Including himself, there are sixteen."

"We are thirteen, all told—plenty for a surprise."

"You forget the proprietor of the rancho, Otis—Jose Diaz. He has fully twenty *vaqueros* in his employ, and sleeping at the residence ; and when hard pushed *vaqueros* will fight like tigers."

"But is Diaz hostile to the Americans? I understood he would remain neutral to save his property."

"Diaz is a fine old gentleman, Otis. Of *hidalgo* ancestry, he inherits a world of Castilian nobility and as much pride. While of course desirous of retaining his property, I fear his inherent loyalty and love of kindred and country, will forbid his standing by and seeing his countrymen attacked and vanquished, without rendering them assistance directly or indi

rectly. These descendants of the Spanish nobility are very sensitive as regards their loyalty, you know."

"But if he gives Alvarez any assistance to-night, you will be justified in appropriating his property, the San Rafael grant, won't you, captain?—there's a cool fifty thousand acres—it will be a vast addition to your rancho."

"Heaven forbid!" said Haywood, warmly. "Diaz is a noble gentleman, and I respect him; and to take from him his property—never!"

"All's fair in war," said Otis, insinuatingly.

"Do not believe it," said Haywood. "There is a limit to every thing. While spying, eaves-dropping, treachery, (saving treason,) falsehood, and similar vices, are considered 'fair-play' among the majority of military men, there is such a thing as pushing them too far. Besides, the United States Government, always magnanimous, would not countenance my appropriating Diaz' property to my own individual use—I, an irregular, independent trooper—a guerrilla."

While giving utterance to these laudable sentiments, a far more potent reason was uppermost in Haywood's mind. Jose Diaz was fortunate in the possession of a lovely, amiable daughter, widely known and admired as the belle of the San Joaquin valley. By her manifold charms and graces, the Senorita Isabella had captivated Haywood, inasmuch as, though not formally avowing his love, he had yet endeavored, by such means as are familiar to all lovers, to reveal his adoration of its fair recipient, and at the same time striving to ascertain her sentiments toward himself.

This last he had not succeeded in doing. If the Senorita Isabella felt more than friendly regard for the handsome trooper, she had studiously concealed it from aught else saving her own secret heart; and while she did not discourage his silent suit by any marks of disfavor, she did not reveal any sign by which he could ascertain her regard for him.

He had been a frequent visitor at San Rafael previous to the war; but upon the declaration of hostilities, Senor Diaz had politely requested him, as belonging to a hostile nation, to cease his visits. This was not unexpected to him; and had it been unaccompanied by any unfavorable omens, he would have been, though not quite content, still willing to

abide temporarily by the father's desire. But, *Senorita Isabella* had another suitor, none other than *Marcos Alvarez*. To this young guerrilla Diaz avowed favorable sentiments. *Isabella*, too, (in *Haywood's* watchful eyes,) received him graciously; and this last was sufficient to create in the trooper's breast far more bitter feelings toward *Alvarez* than those created by mere warfare.

Jealousy, then, was predominant over the many reasons which urged *Haywood* to the capture of *Alvarez*; jealousy, that sharpener of eyes, rankler of breasts, and originator of a large portion of this world's feuds and quarrels. And notwithstanding this jealousy, *Haywood* was too honorable to injure the man who had dismissed him his house and welcomed his rival; nevertheless, there was a tinge of malice in his hearty but somewhat musical voice, as he said:

"We are drawing near our destination now, *Otis*. Bid the men observe great caution, and not to converse; and once we capture this Mexican Jack-a-dandy, we will deliver him up as a prisoner of war to *Commodore Stockton* or *Colonel Fremont*. In the custody of either, he will have plenty of leisure within the walls of some prison, to reflect upon his bloody deeds, against the citizens of the United States.

"Hush!" whispered *Otis*, with a gesture of admonition to the men; "yonder is *San Rafael*."

As they emerged from the silent forest, whose moonlit glades and recesses they had been traversing, the residence of *San Rafael*, with its dazzling white walls glittering in the moonlight, loomed boldly up before them.

CHAPTER II.

THE BIRD'S ESCAPE.

SIMULTANEOUSLY with their emergence from the forest, a score or more of alert hounds, which hover about the purlieus of all Spanish ranchos, raised a furious barking, and advanced toward them, awaking the distant echoes with their discordant uproar. *Haywood* had meditated a quiet possession of the guerrilla's horses before surrounding the house;

but the tumult occasioned by the wakeful curs bade fair to speedily arouse the inmates, and abandoning all caution, which was now superfluous, he cried, sharply :

“ Surround the house, men—three to a side.”

His followers put spurs to their horses and galloped to execute the command ; and in a few seconds the residence was surrounded by thirteen troopers, each with carbine ready to fire when ordered.

The building was the common Spanish house—low, long, with one story and an attic. It stood on the border of a broad plain, and was surrounded with spacious corrals. With the exception of the forest, there was no verdure or foliage adjacent ; hence, in the vivid moonlight, every trooper stood out in bold relief, distinctly visible from the interior of the house.

As yet the troopers perceived no noise or bustle in the building. Every thing was tranquil ; all were buried in profound repose. Intense silence reigned over the premises, the curs having slunk back to their lairs. But the stillness was suddenly broken, as the clear voice of Haywood rung out, in peremptory summons :

“ Hallo ! in the house, there. Hallo ! Marcos Alvarez, surrender.”

Directly a window was thrown open, and a dark-featured man, partially dressed, leaned out over the sill. In the vivid moonlight, they easily recognized him. He was the chief guerrilla, Marcos Alvarez. He held a revolver in his hand, and waving it as if in warning, he demanded, in Spanish :

“ Who is there ? What do you want ?”

“ Will-o'-the-Wisp and the San Miguel Greens—we demand your surrender !” replied Haywood, drawing his saber and slightly brandishing it.

“ Will-o'-the-Wisp—*diable !*” Alvarez muttered, in an angry undertone. “ I thought he was twenty leagues away.”

“ He is not, however, Marcos Alvarez,” said Haywood, overhearing the Mexican’s angry soliloquy ; “ he is here with his troopers, surrounding this house, and he demands your surrender.”

“ Does he ?” sneered the guerrilla, brandishing his revolver—“ does he, Americano ?”

“Yes, Mexican, he does; and you will find it to your positive disadvantage to refuse.”

The Mexican was here joined at the window by a person who appeared and vanished with great rapidity, at the same time keeping back in the shadow of the room, as if to conceal his presence from the Americans. But he was detected, however, by the sharp eye of Haywood, who, presuming the man had taken orders to arouse and form the guerrillas, and foreseeing a desperate and perhaps fruitless combat, cried:

“We don’t intend to parley here all night, Alvarez. Will you, or will you not, yield yourself a prisoner of war?”

“To a pack of coyotes—*diable!* no!” returned Alvarez, snapping his fingers contemptuously at the troopers. “Americano, I defy you. To surrender to such a gang of wolves—bah! The very idea loads me with self-contempt and shame. Americano, do your best; we will laugh, amused with your efforts.”

With this sneering defiance, he again snapped his fingers scornfully at Haywood, and abruptly closing the window, vanished. Then arose sounds of hurriedly-tramping feet and bustlings within the house; vague flashes of light darted and glimmered here and there, and the faint clashing of weapons came to their ears; the guerrillas were forming to defend the house.

Haywood rested in his saddle, restraining his impatient horse for several minutes, undecided what course to pursue, while his followers marveled at his strange and foreign hesitation, so different to his usual prompt action. But he felt himself placed in a rather delicate position. In the house which sheltered his rival and enemy, was the girl whose affections he longed to gain. Should he storm the house, a desperate hand-to-hand conflict would necessarily ensue, and in the *melée* her life, together with her father, would undoubtedly be in jeopardy. Such a procedure might forever blast the hopes which he had hitherto cherished, of winning her love. Aroused from peaceful slumber by sounds of fierce strife, hurried to a place of comparative safety (if such there should chance to be) while he cheered on his men to furious conflict, within the very walls of her home—she would natur-

ally feel terrified and indignant, and undoubtedly incensed at his ferocity, and then farewell, all hopes of her hand.

But on the other hand, to abandon the enterprise and retire, leaving his enemy in full possession of the field, without even striking a blow or fulfilling the hints of punishment with which he had threatened the Mexican officer—such a proceeding would savor of cowardice, would wither his brilliant reputation, tarnish his fame for valor, invoke the stinging derisive laughter, and coarse jeers of all California, lower him in the eyes of his followers—

“Well, captain?” hinted Otis, writhing in impatience.

“Let five men,” shouted Haywood, “let five men support me and we will burst open the door. The others will let no one escape from the house. Dismount!”

Haywood, Otis, and four troopers sprung from their horses and hastily fastened them to an adjacent fence.

“Club your carbines—never mind your revolvers—draw your knives—charge!” shouted Haywood, waving his saber and bounding toward the main entrance. The troopers followed him with a whoop—hurrah!

Meanwhile, the guerrillas within had hastily formed, and with Alvarez at their head, awaited the coming attack. On dashed Haywood and his troopers, into the long porch, and up to the door; and each man launched the butt of his small but heavy carbine against the panels.

Under the shock the door groaned but stood firm.

“Don’t husband your strength, men—down with the door!” cried Haywood, waving his saber swiftly over his head, ready to rush in when the door was forced open.

The men rained a shower of furious blows upon the door. But rancho doors are not easily battered down. They are double, constructed as barricades against the Indians; and this door, no exception to the rule, defied their efforts.

While they were thus energetically working, a side door was suddenly thrown open, and a man strode out with a female clinging timidly to his arm. He was of tall, commanding figure, and was past the prime of life. His uncovered head was silvered with age; but his bearing was erect and proud, and his eyes flashing with brilliant fire as he sternly demanded, advancing toward Haywood:

"What means this assault—are you the leader of these desperadoes, senor?"

His companion was a finely-formed, beautiful young lady of scarcely twenty years, with all her companion's noble presence and high beauty. Haywood with a gesture ordered his men to desist, and lifting his hat reverently to the Senorita Isabella, said:

"I am the leader of these *soldiers*—United States soldiers, Senor Diaz."

The proud Spaniard recognized Haywood, and said with suppressed anger:

"Senor Haywood, you direct an assault upon my private residence—an unwarrantable, ferocious and unprovoked attack. I desire to know the meaning of it."

"Senor Diaz," said Haywood, embarrassed, and blushing as he perceived the dark eyes of the Senorita Isabella bent upon him reproachfully, and as he thought scornfully—"Senor Diaz, you have a band of guerrillas sheltered in your residence. As a soldier of honor, fighting for his country, it is my duty to capture these guerrillas; and though I considered well before attacking your residence, though I lament the necessity which compels it, I must have those guerrillas."

"And demolish a private residence, in order to execute your desire. Senor Haywood, you style yourself a soldier of honor."

"I do, sir!" replied Haywood, hotly, provoked by the insinuation which he felt was unwarranted. "I *am* a soldier of honor, Senor Diaz—a soldier of the noblest nation on the face of the earth. A nation never defeated in war, never detected in treachery or turpitude—"

"And never overrunning a peaceful country, ravaging it brutally, for no other cause than a vulgar and avaricious desire for aggrandizement of territory. You may well call yourself a soldier of the United States—is that your nation's uniform?"

Jose Diaz, as he spoke, pointed to Haywood's green apparel, with a scornful smile.

"No, sir, it is not. We are independent soldiers—irregular troopers."

"Just so. Irregular troopers expresses your organization

perfectly. Irregular troopers—guerrillas—desperadoes ; laying waste a country merely to gratify their ferocious thirst for murder, wanton robbery and rapine."

Haywood's face flamed, but with a struggle he mastered his rising passion. Hitherto, the Senorita Isabella had been silent but attentive spectator ; but now she said, timidly :

"Don't you think you are a little excited and harsh, father ? I am sure these men are not as bad as you say they are."

Her influence over the two men was striking. Senor Diaz' face lost much of its austerity and scorn, and Haywood's anger vanished entirely.

"Pardon me, Senor Haywood," said Diaz, extending his hand while his proud face glowed. "My evil spirit for the moment mastered me."

"Don't mention it," murmured the trooper, grasping his hand warmly, and coloring highly, conscious that the bewitching dark eyes of Isabella were bent upon him.

"And now let us cease this altercation," said Diaz, after a moment's embarrassing silence. "Senor Haywood, we have hitherto (and I trust we are now,) been good friends. For the sake of our friendship depart now, and renew your hostilities at some other time."

"Senor Diaz, there are men in this house in arms against my country, and as a soldier it is my duty to capture them if possible."

Again the Spaniard's ire rose.

"Senor," he said, haughtily, "these gentlemen are my guests ; and as such they shall be protected. It shall never be said of Jose Diaz" (and he drew himself up proudly) "that he once neglected the laws of hospitality. As a Spanish gentleman, senor, I will protect my guests."

"I respect your sentiments, sir, and sympathize with your sense of honor," replied Haywood. Then he added, firmly : "But in times of war, social laws must yield to military law and usage."

"You still persist, then, in breaking down my door ?"

"I must capture the guerrillas, senor, if possible," replied Haywood, with respectful decision.

"Can not you wait until morning ?" asked the Senorita Is-

Isabella in a persuasive tone, with a bewitching smile; "can not you call to-morrow morning?"

"Call to-morrow morning!" contemptuously growled a trooper, incensed at the delay; "what a devil of a silly question."

"Silence, sir!" shouted Haywood, towering above the trooper; "if you make another such remark, I'll give you a punishment you will remember."

The man shrunk back abashed.

At the senorita's artless question, notwithstanding she had sweetly smiled up on him, Haywood felt the blood coursing madly through his veins. She had requested him to forbear, while she could contrive means for his rival's escape. He felt that Alvarez had vanquished him in the battle for love, and was reveling in her affections. The thought was madness.

"Senorita," he said, reproachfully, "you at least can appreciate a soldier's honor and good name. It is my duty to capture your lov—Marcos Alvarez, and—"

A trooper galloped round the house and up to the door.

"Captain," he cried, wildly, "they have escaped and are riding away. Lead us on."

"Escaped!" demanded Haywood in astonishment—"escaped!"

"Yes. They slipped out by a back way, and rode down Moore, who tried to stop them. Listen—hear them!"

Haywood listened, and heard the thunder of hoofs on the hard ground some distance away. He saw it all. Diaz and Isabella had engaged him in exciting discussion while Marcos Alvarez had escaped. The entire indignation of Diaz was but feigned as a ruse, to detain him while the Mexican fled.

"Mount!" cried Haywood. "Mount and chase. And you, senorita," he said, bitterly, "I did not think that you would—could—stand smiling, wearing a face of—acting a part while—"

He could say no more. Jealousy for the moment deprived him of speech. With a bitter, reproachful glance at the beautiful senorita, he strode away. The troopers were already mounted and galloping in pursuit of the flying Californians. He vaulted into the saddle, maddened with jealous thoughts, and dashed after his men.

The young girl stood for a moment wringing her hands, then she rushed a few steps after him and cried:

"Oh Roland, Roland! you wrong me—you do. I did not know—indeed I did not—"

She was unheard by the trooper who was deaf and nearly blind with jealousy. Bitterly weeping she stood gazing after his rapidly receding form, striving to distinguish him through her tears, while he dashed the spurs madly into his flying steed—flying to overtake his successful, and now doubly detested rival.

CHAPTER III.

"I LOVE YOU—I LOVE YOU!"

THE flying guerrillas had but little start of the troopers—not more than a quarter of a mile, scarcely enough to be worth preserving; for the Californians bestrode mustangs, jaded by a week's hard service, while the steeds of the troopers were without a single exception "American stock," animals for speed and general use, far superior to the mustangs. Of this the guerrillas were well aware, and knowing the uselessness of flight, knowing they would soon be overtaken, and with their backs toward the Americans under great disadvantage, at their leader's command they halted and faced their coming enemies.

This was not the sole reason for their stand. The Californians were not lacking in physical courage; and this being augmented by their native inordinate self-esteem they even desired a conflict, trusting in their valor and superior numbers to vanquish the Americans.

There was still another reason. Marcos Alvarez had, only the evening before, thrown himself at Isabella's feet, and offered himself, heart, body and soul, to the beautiful senorita. In his vast egotism he had not for a moment dreamed of a refusal; but to his utter consternation, anger and mortification, he had received a sedate, polite negative.

There is no greater fury than a jealous Mexican. With

the often erroneous divination of the Genius of Jealousy, Alvarez at once conceived he had a rival; and well aware of Haywood's frequent visits to San Rafael, previous to the war, with sundry concomitant evil omens, he had at once declared the American as his rival, and vowed vengeance upon him.

This was the chief reason for the sudden stand taken by the guerrillas, although it was unsuspected by Alvarez' followers.

Marcos Alvarez unsheathed his saber, and drew the treacherous blade across his hand. In utter disregard of all chivalrous rules of warfare, he had ground the entire blade to its keenest edge; and with a *bueno!* of satisfaction he held the weapon to his shoulder, and awaited the coming of his hated rival.

The troopers came thundering on in a compact body, with drawn revolvers, and long knives unsheathed. Without a moment's hesitation or the slightest dismay at the resolute front of the guerrillas who were drawn in line, they shouted the whoop—hurrah! and dashed upon them.

A desperate hand-to-hand conflict ensued. Both bands were similarly armed; and each man as he met his foeman chose his favorite and deadliest weapon, and entered the bloody task.

It was a fearful combat—a battle with knives.

When the hostile parties met, Alvarez spurred his horse aside from the combat, and disregarding it entirely, waited in grim silence for the coming of his particular enemy. Haywood was in the rear of his troopers, having, as we have seen, been the last man to leave the residence. As he galloped on he saw his gallant troopers ride down the guerrillas, and perceived a single horseman ride out from the strife and halt, facing him. In the brilliant moonlight he had no difficulty in recognizing this horseman as his rival—he was waiting for him.

In Haywood's jealous anger this procedure pleased him. He would meet his rival face to face—saber to saber—and the cold steel would settle the variance between them.

As he drew close he put his horse to his swiftest speed, and bore directly toward the waiting Mexican, resolving to ride him down. But the watchful guerrilla darted aside as

his enemy thundered down upon him, evading the rush. As he did so, he aimed a heavy blow at Haywood's head—a blow, which, if it had proven successful, would have severed his head from his body. * But the trooper was on the alert; and as he dashed by, he parried the blow with a dextrous movement of his saber, and the guerrilla's weapon glanced harmlessly off.

Wheeling, he returned to the assault, and was met half-way by the Mexican. Halting, the foes gazed warily at each other, seeking an unguarded point in each other's defense.

Both men met as deadly foes. Within the breast of each surged an inveterate hate which nothing but his adversary's death could quench. It was a passion far greater and more lasting than the hostility of warfare—it was the urging of the demon, Jealousy.

In their anger the characteristics of their respective nations revealed themselves. The Mexican's swarthy visage was convulsed with rage, and every muscle of his body under an intense strain, quivered. His dark eyes blazed; his mouth was slightly open, revealing his gleaming teeth under his black mustache—teeth which gnashed with the ferocity of a wolf; and every corrugation of his countenance reflected his passion.

On the other hand, Haywood, though fully as much under the influence of anger, preserved a calm rigid exterior which was even more terrible than his adversary's blazing fury. His face was pale, his lips were closed firmly; only his glittering blue eyes revealed the intense passion which was raging within him. He was generally pleasant and urbane, keeping a check upon his evil emotions; but jealousy, the strongest of all, had mastered him, as it will without exception the most frigid person on this earth, and from a gentleman he had become a devil.

The combatants sat for a moment in their saddles, each gazing the other in the eyes. Around them arose groans, oaths, and the concomitant discordant sounds of strife. They heeded them not—they were oblivious to aught saving their own presence.

Suddenly the Mexican made a furious thrust at his ad

versary's breast. The lunge was made with great rapidity and suddenness ; but Haywood, on the alert, parried it at the last moment.

Both now abandoned all reserve and hesitation. Grasping their sabers yet more firmly, they swung them over their heads, and entered upon the strife. Neither were skillful fencers. The sword, until the war, had been an unknown weapon to their hands ; and disregarding nicety of aim, and delicacy of action, they depended upon sheer strength of arm to accomplish what they lacked in skill.

The sabers gleamed coldly in the moon's rays as they flashed above their wielders' heads. Fast and furious fell the blows—cut and thrust, parry and slash.

The Mexican had received a slight flesh-wound in his sword-arm. Though not serious, it in some degree detracted from the violence of his blows. Haywood quickly observed this, and in proportion as his antagonist's blows diminished in force, his became faster and more furious.

Alvarez began a gradual retreat, but still kept his face toward his hated enemy. He was no longer on the offensive—he exerted all his strength and sparse skill, in parrying the trooper's furious blows.

“ Yield, villain, yield !” cried Haywood, swinging his saber down with tremendous force toward his foe's head.

“ Never, dog !” exclaimed the Mexican, as he with great difficulty parried the blow.

As Haywood's gaze chanced to flit for a moment toward the strife which raged among the subordinates, he perceived that the violence and deadly earnestness of their solitary struggle had attracted the attention of a powerful guerrilla, who was seeking to disengage himself from two troopers who were pressing him closely, that he might render assistance to his leader. Haywood saw that he was liable to imminent peril, for the guerrilla was a giant among the combatants, and dealt heavy blows about him with his clubbed carbine, with marked effect ; and increasing his assault, the trooper determined to finish the conflict as soon as possible.

“ Surrender, Mexican !” he cried, hoarsely, swinging his heavy saber down again with augmented force. “ Surrender, while you have a chance, and save your life.”

"To you, American whelp! Never!" gasped Alvarez, who, though hard pressed and in deadly peril, had not in the least abated his ferocious hate.

Haywood now exerted every particle of his strength. He rained down blows upon his enemy with such rapidity and tremendous force that the Mexican, despite his agility and watchfulness, felt that if assistance did not soon arrive he would succumb.

Fortunately for him, assistance was at hand. The gigantic guerrilla, seeing Alvarez' imminent peril, with a mighty blow struck down a trooper with whom he was engaged, and evading a knife-blow aimed at him by Otis, galloped toward the struggling leaders. He was unperceived by Haywood, who was absorbed in striving to fell his adversary; and riding close, he raised his heavy carbine aloft, and with a deliberate aim swung it down upon Haywood.

Had the blow descended fully upon the trooper's head, which was the intent of the guerrilla, Haywood's earthly career would have been instantly terminated, but he perceived the descending weapon and dodged, though not sufficiently to entirely evade the blow.

The carbine fell upon his sword-arm, breaking it instantly and the trooper, with a groan, fell from his horse.

With a wild cry, Alvarez was springing upon his prostrate foe, when the gigantic guerrilla detained him and pointed toward the *melee*.

The Californians were routed, and panic-stricken, were galloping away in full retreat, closely followed by half a dozen troopers, while several more, led by Otis, were galloping to assist Haywood.

No time was to be lost. Alvarez, though reluctant to abandon his vanquished enemy without finishing his existence by a revengeful sword-thrust, saw that the coming troopers would in a few seconds fall upon him; and wheeling his horse, followed by his faithful guerrilla, he galloped away with a fierce scowl down upon Haywood, closely pursued by Otis' small band; and Haywood was left bleeding alone upon the battle-field.

As the pursued and pursuers with wild cries rapidly left the scene of battle behind them, a young girl, with a low

moan, ran toward Haywood, who lay motionless. During the strife between the rival leaders she had stood at a little distance, watching its progress with terrified intensity; and when Haywood was struck down by the guerrilla, she shrieked in terror.

It was the beautiful Senorita Isabella.

She now darted toward him with little low moans, and raising his head pillowed it upon her bosom. She showered passionate kisses upon his pale face with all the fervor and charming vehemence of her warm Southern nature; and as he opened his eyes languidly, she pressed him fondly to her breast, and with her lovely countenance glowing with sweet commiseration, cried:

“You are hurt—you are suffering—oh, my love!”

His face flamed suddenly, and his eyes flashed. Although suffering intensely at the slightest movement, he raised his uninjured arm and wound it around her neck. All his ire, all his consuming jealousy, had vanished; and bathing his face with her tears, she sobbed over him with lovely sympathy, and whispered:

“Dear Roland, my treasure, I love you—I love you.”

It was the happiest moment of his life.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MEXICAN'S CURSE.

IN a short time the troopers returned with jaded horses, with no prisoners, the Californians having leaped their horses over a deep *arroyo* and escaped, leaving the Americans, whose steeds were not trained to daring leaps, grumbling and shouting maledictions, unable to follow.

The battle had been deadly. Two troopers, valuable men in peace and war, had been mortally wounded, and now lay dead upon the field. Near by were stretched the corpses of three guerrillas.

Nearly all of the troopers had received flesh wounds, but

none of a serious nature. Of those sustained by the Californians they could form no idea, but as the conflict had been fierce many of them must have been at least slightly wounded.

The Senorita Isabella still hovered fondly over the trooper to whom she had expressed her ardent love. Satisfied that Haywood's life was not in danger, her wild grief had abated, and she now found vent for her new-found joy by uttering sweet words of consolation, which were to him a delicious balm.

The troopers placed him upon his trusty horse which had remained close to his master, and the band filed toward the residence of San Rafael. Here they were greeted by Diaz, who cordially welcomed the wounded trooper to his homestead walls. As said before, the Californians generally had no paramount interest in the war, and many even preferred to be under the domination of the Great Republic. The Mexican Government had maltreated many of their highest and most influential citizens, appropriating their possessions, secularizing their missions, and many other tyrannical acts; and while they considered that the Americans could not well injure them further, they might prove generous, indulgent conquerors. How well the Americans (individually) repaid the trusting confidence of the Californians, every resident of the Golden State only too well knows. And so do the California lawyers.

Diaz, while naturally chafing somewhat at the signal defeat of his countrymen, was anxious to make amends to Haywood for his previous harsh language. Furthermore, his honor felt wounded at the trooper's suspicions of his complicity in the guerrillas' escape, (of which at the time he was not cognizant) and he resolved to inform him, by acts of kindness and hospitality, that his suspicions were erroneous.

He therefore welcomed Haywood kindly. He threw open his commodious dwelling to the fatigued troopers; the best room that the house afforded was placed at Haywood's disposal; he himself, a homely but not unskillful surgeon, set his broken arm, which was merely a simple fracture; and provided him with a nurse who would consider her task a

sweet, holy one, and would hover over him night and day ; and Haywood rejoiced.

Senor Diaz was not actuated by any motives of fear in his abundant hospitality. It might be inferred, that now the guerrillas were temporarily dispersed, his residence would be wholly at the uncertain will of the troopers, who would, perhaps, urged by unjust suspicions, wantonly injure his property ; but no fears of the sort influenced him. He felt that he had been too severe with Haywood, and with true nobility was anxious to amend his severity.

A fortnight passed quietly by. The war was now centered at Los Angeles, which town was besieged by Colonel Fremont. Alvarez' guerrillas had been unheard of, and Haywood presumed they were carrying on their desultory warfare near the burden of the war.

In tranquillity, and under the sweet supervision of the Senorita Isabella, Haywood rapidly regained his former vigor. The days went swiftly by with Isabella by his bedside. Now soothing him with her guitar and melodious voice ; now surprising him with entertaining conversation, which revealed no common intellect and plentiful knowledge ; and again, yielding to her ardent temperament, delighting him with her captivating proofs of undying affection.

Haywood waxed poetical and declared himself in heaven ; when suddenly the delicious tranquillity was disturbed.

All San Rafael was quiet under the gentle beams of a new moon. Otis, and the troopers, had been absent several days upon a foray, and were to return that night ; hence the rancho was unguarded.

Sunset had stolen away two hours ago. An owl hooted across the plain ; the droning music of nocturnal insects resounded sleepily in the still atmosphere ; the drowsy notes of a distant whippowil floated lazily into the chamber wherein lay Haywood, lulling him to sleep. All was quiet over forest and plain, and all was tranquil about the rancho de San Rafael.

A man stealthily emerged from the adjacent forest, and walked quickly with noiseless steps toward the dwelling. His features were swarthy ; naturally sullen they were now

doubly saturnine with hate, intense and unquenchable. He was attired in the Mexican manner: glazed *sombrero*, dark *serape* and fanciful vestments; and in his hand he bore an unsheathed saber.

Marcos Alvarez.

He was evidently on no peaceful mission, for his actions were cat-like and he glanced right and left with the quick stealth of a transgressor. Seeking such shadows as would facilitate an unobserved passage to the dwelling, he glided rapidly up to the door.

He was well acquainted with the house and its usual occupants. In two rooms only were lights—in all San Rafael only two persons were yet sitting up—Senor Diaz, and the Senorita Isabella.

He knew that Otis and the troopers were expected to return soon; and as if bound upon some criminal purpose which required dispatch and adroitness, he used as much celerity as was consistent with caution.

He stepped upon the porch and listened. All was still. He noiselessly entered the house, saber in hand.

Across the house extended a wide passage, dividing the dwelling into two equal parts. From this passage doors opened into the several apartments. He was well acquainted with the doors and their corresponding rooms, and stealing along the passage he noiselessly opened the furthest door, and entered.

He was in Haywood's room. This apartment was directly opposite Isabella's. The proximity of the two apartments maddened Alvarez. Debased and licentious himself, he could not conceive purity in others, and his imagination conjured up a thousand grisly phantoms of guilt.

For a moment he stood in the door, gazing ferociously upon his rival. The broad rays of the moon streamed through the window and across the bed, revealing every lineament in Haywood's face.

He was quietly sleeping, and the Mexican saw his slumber was peaceful and complacent. The reposing features were relaxed into a smile, created undoubtedly by a pleasant dream. Alvarez muttered a curse. No rejected lover, thought he, could sleep smilingly; and his rival was sleeping in the

house of the senorita, and was sleeping smilingly. Ten thousand curses.

He drew his saber to his shoulder, and advanced to the bed. Standing over his slumbering rival he glared down upon him with a demoniacal gaze of hate and revenge.

He lifted his weapon and poised it over the unconscious trooper's head. Then as if upon a second thought he quickly sheathed it, and from his belt drew a long glittering knife.

He muttered a fearful blasphemy against the sleeping trooper, who slept on, all unconscious of the deadly danger that menaced him. Then he bent down still closer over his rival, and with swarthy face gleaming with fury, raised the knife to bury it in Haywood's breast.

The knife did not descend. As he was on the eve of launching it downward, a person rushed into the room and caught his arm. He turned with a curse, and encountered the flashing eyes of Isabella.

"Villain!" she cried. "Villain, villain! How dare you? Coward!"

To ensure her lover's safety she glided between the bed and Alvarez. Still clasping his arm with superhuman strength, she cried again:

"Help! murder!"

Alvarez, balked, baffled, trembled with guilty rage and humiliation. He strove to break away from her and fly, but with the strength of terror she held him fast.

"Senorita!" he gasped, "loose me!"

Haywood, aroused by the noise, arose, and sitting up reached for the saber which hung upon the wall by his pillow.

"What means this?" he demanded, "villain, loose her!"

Senor Diaz, alarmed by his daughter's cries, rushed into the room. Seeing as he supposed, Alvarez assaulting Isabella, he rushed upon him and struck him to the floor.

"He tried to murder Roland!" cried Isabella, pointing to the prostrate Mexican, while she trembled with indignation. "See his knife."

"Marcos Alvarez!" demanded Diaz, sternly, "what are you doing here?"

The Mexican slowly rose to his feet and glared savagely round upon them, but vouchsafed no reply.

"What are you doing here?" again demanded the aroused gentleman. "Tell me!"

The Mexican made no reply, but glared furiously upon Haywood and Isabella.

"Why do you have that knife?" persisted Senor Diaz; "is it for murder—were you here for *murder*, Marcos Alvarez?"

"He was indeed!" exclaimed Isabella. "He was in the act of striking—stabbing—standing over Roland, when I arrested his hand."

"Murderer! murderer!" cried Diaz, glowing with anger. "You do not deny it, Marcos Alvarez?"

Still the furious Mexican gave no answer.

"Your silence confirms the accusation," said Diaz, sternly. "Marcos Alvarez, I have hitherto received you into my house as a suitor for my daughter's hand. I have regarded you as a gentleman, treated you as such, and contemplated bestowing my daughter's hand upon you. But never, *never*, will I give her to a desperado. After all my kindness to you, you now enter to kill—murder—in the night—a soldier, defenseless on a sick bed. Failing to defeat him in open and honorable warfare, you steal at night to stab him while he sleeps. Marcos Alvarez leave my house. And forever. Never darken my doors again—never come into my sight, for I now loath you. Away, homicide—away!"

His countenance glowed with righteous anger, but the face of the baffled Mexican was the face of a demon as he said, in a low, quiet voice:

"I *will* go, Senor Diaz—I *will* go. And take this curse upon yourself, upon your daughter, and upon all who may be within your house, and especially that dog of an American. I curse you all. Wherever you three may go—wherever you may be, there will I be also, watching you. For I will follow each and all of you to the end of the world, but I will have my revenge. Again—my curse rest upon you, your brazen daughter, your cowardly dog of an American, and upon every one in this house. Adios."

He was gone.

CHAPTER V.

A PACK OF DEMONS.

ALVAREZ had no sooner disappeared than Isabella, with the universal custom of her sex in similar situations, immediately proceeded to faint away in her father's arms, and Diaz bestowing his attention to her restoration unconsciously regained his usual equanimity as far as his exterior revealed his feelings.

Not so Haywood. He had nearly lost his life—lost it in an ignoble manner. He shuddered at thinking how close he had been to his grave while sleeping; and while he execrated the perfidious Mexican, and vowed never to give him another opportunity of the kind, his heart went out in a flood of thanksgiving to Isabella, now doubly loved.

Diaz bore his unconscious daughter to her chamber, while Haywood absorbed it in thought mechanically dressed. When he had fully attired himself he bared his uninked arm, and moved it slowly up and down complacently, watching the sinews that stood out like white cords from the solid flesh.

It is as natural for a soldier, when thinking of an enemy, to perform this satisfactory action, as it is for a woman to bathe herself in tears when angered; and when Haywood pulled down his sleeve and secured it, he felt much better.

His right arm was nearly ready for service. The splinters had been removed several days before, and although all pain had departed from the wounded member, it was still numb and weak.

He was dubiously pressing it between his fingers, when he heard a sound in the forest which caused him to start in vague alarm. It was a long-drawn, distant whistle, reverberating shrilly at first, then gradually diminishing until it died away in the distant glades.

He knew the sound: it was Alvarez' signal for his followers to assemble. He immediately closed and barred the window, then hastened to Senor Diaz.

The latter was just coming from Isabella's room when Haywood met him. Again the long-drawn whistle.

"Senor Diaz," said Haywood, earnestly, placing his hand upon the Spaniard's arm, "do you understand that sound?"

The old gentleman listened until the whistle had ceased; he shook his head.

"I do not," he replied, looking at the trooper curiously.

"It is a signal given by Marcos Alvarez to assemble his men. Hark! hear that?"

Another whistle, shorter and further away, so faint as to be scarcely perceptible, floated out over the moonlit forest, far away.

"I hear it," observed Diaz, calmly; "it is undoubtedly an answer."

"An answer it is," replied Haywood, with concern; "and we had better close the windows and secure the doors, as soon as possible."

Diaz smiled at the trooper's earnestness.

"And why so?" he questioned.

"Because we have not seen the last of Alvarez," replied Haywood, in a tone of conviction.

"You do not mean to say that you anticipate an attack upon the house by him?" said Diaz, in surprise.

"I do; and why not?"

"He will not dare to attack my residence. Besides, he and I are of the same nation in this war."

"That signifies nothing. Have you forgotten so soon the curse he bestowed upon us all not an hour ago—his vow of revenge?"

"He was in a passion; he is naturally fiery, and when angered, knows not what he says or does. When he becomes cool, he will retract his evil vows."

"Senor Diaz, don't believe it. I have seen men in passion before to-day; but I never before saw a demon. With all deference to yourself and respect for your race, I will say, that a thwarted, jealous Spaniard or Mexican is a very demon—the latter, at least, is; and I charge you, as I charged myself—beware!"

"You believe, then, that he will be so blindly furious as to attack us?"

"Believe! I could guarantee it. Why not? He knows that we two are the only men on the rancho—he knows my troopers are absent—and believe me, Senor Diaz, (for I am, as you well know, not a timid man, and am accustomed to face danger,) I actually apprehend an assault, and in less time than an hour. Let us secure the doors and windows."

"Hark!" exclaimed Diaz.

Another long whistle, this time proceeding from a different quarter of the forest. Then several, from various directions, successively floated out upon the still night air.

"Do you hear that?" demanded Haywood, triumphantly. "They are assembling, and if my experience and knowledge of guerrillas avail me any thing, we will be attacked very soon. Come—let us bar the doors and windows."

Struck by the conviction expressed in the trooper's tones and countenance, and remembering several evil traits in Alvarez' character, which he had hitherto considered trivial, but which now exposed the ferocious, revengeful nature of the Mexican, Diaz assisted Haywood in closing the house. As we have previously remarked, the doors of California rancho residences are extremely strong, being made of double and even triple inch-planks, spiked together, and further strengthened by huge bolts and oaken bars. In the good old days of California romance, (we do not refer to the hackneyed, stale, novel-worn, "flush times of 'forty-nine,'" but a decade or more previous—when the Indians, far fiercer and more predatory than their Eastern brethren, carried terror into the hearts of the simple Californians,) every house was a fort, built of the toughest and most durable material—adobe-brick walls without, and stout boarding within—a wall several feet thick. The residence of San Rafael was one of these individual forts; and once inside, barred and bolted in, a few men could successfully withstand double, triple, their number of invaders.

There was one, and only one, weak point in the dwelling: the windows. Several years before, Diaz had become wearied of the ponderous, unsightly shutters yecept windows, and had removed them, substituting the common fragile sash. These windows were the only pregnable point in the walls,

and afforded a dangerous but sure mode of ingress. Marcos Alvarez, perfectly acquainted with San Rafael, was well aware of this.

When all was secure, Diaz busied himself in loading several rifles and fowling-pieces which hung upon the walls, and placed hunting-knives in convenient positions in the different apartments. The gentle Isabella viewed these warlike preparations with dismay. Her peaceful nature revolted at bloodshed, and held war in abhorrence; but she kept her misgivings within her secret heart, and quietly watched her lover and father as they prepared for the impending storm.

At length all preparations necessary were concluded. The two men took each a rifle, Diaz grasped a hunting-knife while Haywood stroked the trenchant saber by his side; and with Isabella between them, they awaited the coming attack.

From some occult reason Isabella's little soft hand became nestled in the trooper's strong one. He pressed it gently, and whispered:

"Fear not, dearest—you are safe with me."

Diaz heard the whisper, and distinguished an accompanying sound which reminded him of his wooing-days. As the house, being entirely closed, was dark, he could see neither of the lovers. But he did not need light to reveal to him their position, for a brief retrospect of his courting-days sufficed him, and his face grew sad as his thoughts wandered back to his lovely young wife beneath the sod, far away in sunny Spain.

Suddenly, there arose a rumbling without in the direction of the forest. It increased to a thunder of hoofs, and soon they heard a body of horsemen gallop up to the door.

"Hallo, in there! Diaz, you scoundrel, we have come for you, for your brassy girl, and for your sneaking Will-o'-the-Wisp. Diaz, you villain, open to us."

The voice was that of Marcos Alvarez, and it had a discordant, unusual intonation.

Evidently he had become intoxicated.

"He is mad with liquor," whispered Haywood, boiling with anger at the epithet applied to Isabella. "He is crazy,

mad, with liquor; but I'll remember his vile, slanderous speech."

"I wonder where he obtained his liquor?" queried Diaz.
"I am sure there is not a shop for twenty-five leagues."

"Every Mexican guerrilla carries his bottle of *aguardiente*," replied Haywood. "He has doubtless plied himself with liquor to stimulate him for the consummation of some devilish deed; he speaks again."

"Open to us—open to the lords of California, Diaz, you sanctimonious hypocrite. Open the door, or we will open it for you. *Si, caramba, si!*"

"*Caramba, si!*" echoed a score of frenzied voices; "*si, car-r-ramba, si!*"

"What terrible language!" whispered Isabella, shuddering. Haywood drew her closely to him.

Crack! A pistol-shot rung out, and a bullet dully buried itself in the door; and again the shrieked command:

"Diaz—Diaz, you cowardly cur, open the door!"

The blood coursed rapidly through the Spaniard's veins. Never before had such insulting, profane language been addressed to him. He shuddered as he thought that he had once intended Alvarez as his daughter's husband, and returned thanks for her fortunate escape.

We question whether there was, that night, in all California, notwithstanding the war and bloodshed which was dyeing its plains, such another band of crazed inebriates as that which howled before the door of San Rafael. It numbered a score of drunken guerrillas, inflamed with *aguardiente*, burning to execute some diabolical deed. They were in that dangerous state of intoxication in which the inebriate imagines himself possessed of the courage and strength of a lion; and racks his reeling brain to discover some object or scheme sufficiently demoniacal and dangerous on which to expend the inordinate strength and daring which madden him by its overwhelming potency.

Led by Alvarez, they rode around the dwelling, brandishing their knives and rending the air with ribaldry; causing Isabella to shudder with terror, and the two men to tremble with passion.

Alvarez, whose crazed brain apparently drew a similitude

between his assault and the previous attack of the troopers upon the dwelling, conceived the idea of forcing the main door, which was the strongest barricade the house possessed. In his intoxication he entirely forgot the windows. Bidding his men dismount, and leading them, he sprung upon the porch and commenced a furious assault upon the door, the guerrillas using their clubbed carbines. Several weapons were broken in the assault, but the men thus deprived of their carbines snatched heavy rails from a neighboring fence, and with hideous blasphemies lanced them against the door, which, constructed for this very style of attack, admirably resisted their most violent efforts.

Suddenly Alvarez paused, and lifting his hand, commanded the guerrillas to desist. His swarthy, inflamed face, blazing with intoxication, now gleamed wildly, as a brilliant idea occurred to his reeling brain.

"It is no use!" he shouted. "We can't break it down. We will burn them out. We will fire the house."

Happy thought! Noble conception! The proposition caught the crazed guerrillas like the contagion. A cry—a maniacal shriek—arose, curdling the blood of those within.

"Fire! fire! fire! burn them out! roast them alive! roast Will-o'-the-Wisp! Fire! fire! fire!"

CHAPTER VI.

A FORETASTE OF DEATH.

THE guerrillas seized upon the proposition of firing the residence with mad delight. Each drunken Mexican flung aside his carbine, and while some groped in their pockets for matches, others ran to the barns for hay. They toiled with crazy eagerness, and soon a great pile of hay filled the spacious porch.

When so much of this combustible material had been collected that it entirely filled the porch, Alvarez applied the match of destruction. The hay ignited instantaneously, and

the flames shot upward, rapidly seizing upon the wood-work of the porch. Soon the heat became intense, and the guerrillas were forced to withdraw from the fire. Higher and higher rose the red, licking tongues—higher, still higher—until they towered above the dwelling and flamed aloft toward the cold, moonlit sky.

The guerrillas snatched off their broad sombreros and flung them aloft, singing and yelling in fiendish delight. Alvarez, on whose swarthy visage gleamed a quiet but ferocious smile, detailed a squad to fetch more hay from the barn and heap it upon the fire; and thus replenished, the fire assumed the startling proportions of a conflagration.

"Will you open the door now, Diaz?" cried Alvarez, mockingly. "Will you ever cross swords with me again, oh, brave and daring Will-o'-the-Wisp? Will you balk me again, Senorita Isabella—life of my heart? *Oh, diable! diable!*"

"*Diable! diable!*" shrieked the guerrillas, in fiendish chorus.

Miles away a dozen troopers, clad in green, were leisurely wending their way toward San Rafael. They noticed a lurid gleam in the western sky. It increased to a glow, and soon the entire horizon was illuminated.

"There's a fire off yonder toward San Rafael," remarked one of the troopers, carelessly.

"I see," rejoined their leader. "But it is beyond the rancho—a league or more, I should judge."

"Not so," said another. "By heaven, I believe it is the rancho!"

A hurried consultation ensued among the troopers—a consultation interspersed with many earnest gestures; then they put spurs to their jaded horses, and galloped for San Rafael, miles away.

All conversation was suspended. Each man's face wore an anxious look; and each and all, as they urged onward their horses, kept their steadfast gaze upon the glowing western sky.

They were miles away.

Within the walls of San Rafael a hurried council was being held by its inmates, relative to the fearful danger which menaced them. As yet the fierce flames had not reached to the interior; but they were slowly creeping along the wood-work, and were even now consuming the doors.

"I am afraid we are in terrible danger," said Diaz, in a low, anxious tone, casting an apprehensive glance toward Isabella; "the villains have started a fire which they can not extinguish even if they should desire to, which is improbable."

"But the walls, thank heaven, are of adobe," exclaimed Haywood, hopefully; "and the flames can not penetrate them."

"All for naught!" said Diaz, gloomily. "There are three doors which open into the porch. Every one of those doors must take fire—it is impossible to prevent it—and once burning, they will quickly extend their flames throughout the house. And then the roof—see, that is even now burning."

As he spoke, a tiny tongue of flame crept in like a radiant serpent through a crevice. This was followed by another and more; and soon the whole line of eaves was burning.

Now the room was illuminated by the bright flames, and they could distinguish each other's faces, and each was startled by the expression of anxiety which was visible in his companions' features.

Smoke began to affect their nostrils and eyes, warning them of horrible suffering. It was already painful; how could they endure it in a short time?

"Something must be done!" said Diaz, striding to and fro, and gazing anxiously at the burning roof, which was being rapidly consumed, as the flames became larger and more rapacious, and crept steadily higher.

"Can not we escape by a back window?" inquired Isabella, who was shuddering with alarm. "Do try and see."

Diaz glided softly to one of a line of windows which admitted light from the rear of the house. He opened it and cautiously peered out. He closed it hurriedly and drew back.

Before the window, as if in anticipation of Diaz' act, stood Marcos Alvarez with a ferocious smile on his swarthy face. He presented a revolver.

"Keep back!" he commanded, quietly. "You shall not come out. We intend to offer you up as a burnt sacrifice."

Putting a silver whistle to his lips, he blew a sharp blast. At the summons soon his ready followers were by his side. He formed them in a line extending from end to end of the building, and awaited in grim silence for the death-shrieks of his innocent foes.

The front of the house needed no guard—one was already there in the rushing fire which had now set in blaze the entire front of the dwelling. The flames were now raging within the house. The roof too was wholly ablaze; and if the troopers did not soon arrive, the devoted trio would unavoidably perish.

The smoke within had become so dense that Isabella reeled and showed unmistakable signs of fainting. Should that event occur, death by suffocation would surely ensue.

The thought was madness to the two men.

Suddenly Haywood uttered a low cry, and seizing a knife sprung toward the outer wall. A window had at one time furnished light to this portion of the house, but for some reason it had been walled up with adobe bricks. This was the only portion of the wall free from the inner planking; and through this place Haywood determined to force his way, and escape with his friends.

He had but little time in which to execute his task. The smoke was rapidly becoming denser and more unbearable. Their lungs smarted and they gasped for breath. They could scarcely perceive each other even in the strong glare of the fire; and in a few moments—

"My God!" groaned Diaz, supporting Isabella, who was at the point of swooning; "will the troopers never arrive?"

Haywood was aware that this end of the residence was not under the supervision of the guerrillas, and could he force an egress they might escape. He threw himself upon the wall with all the strength of which his uninjured arm was capable; but the bricks, fifteen inches broad, defied his efforts.

"Make haste!" cried Diaz, pointing to the half fainting *senorita*; "see my child!"

Haywood turned. A brief glance sufficed him in which to perceive her prostrated condition. His face grew deathly pale, as drawing his knife he commenced a furious onslaught upon the bricks.

A difficult task was before him. The adobe bricks, for years exposed to the glare of a tropical sun, had become as solid as cement, and his knife, though driven with great force, made little impression upon them. But he toiled furiously.

"My God!" again groaned Diaz, "my child, my child! she is dying."

He himself, a strong, hearty man, was nearly exhausted by the dense smoke which filled the room. Isabella's features were pallid—she was sinking to the floor and gasping for breath—she was rapidly succumbing.

What would they have given for a single draught of that pure air without, which the yelling guerrillas were drinking into their broad lungs, and which gave them breath in which to shout their ribaldry? Worlds.

For several minutes Haywood continued his mad work, and such was his despairing vehemence he had soon completed half his task. But his strength suddenly failed him. The dense smoke had nearly suffocated him and he was on the point of sinking to the floor in utter exhaustion, when he heard a loud crash and a shout of joy from Senor Diaz, causing him to look in that direction.

A portion of the roof had fallen in, directly down in the apartment, and close beside Diaz and his sinking daughter. The smoke, released from its bondage, obeyed the laws of density, and rolled upward through the aperture, and heavier cold air rushed in to fill the vacuum.

In a few moments the smoke had nearly vanished, and the two men felt their vigor return, though their lungs were sorely oppressed. Isabella being more susceptible and weaker, did not readily recover from her exhaustion; but by degrees the cool air revived her, and she was able to stand with Diaz' assistance.

But now a new and frightful danger threatened them. The *debris* of the fallen roof had communicated fire to the

floor; and the latter being of seasoned redwood, blazed with alarming readiness, and extending themselves rapidly, the flames soon formed a semicircle, completely imprisoning them. In a few moments, unless they effected their escape, they would suffer a horrible death.

Diaz beholding this new danger, sprung to assist Haywood. The creeping flames came nearer and nearer, and forced Isabella to retreat to the wall. Her propinquity impeded the two men; they had not room in which to work, for the fire had driven her into their very arms.

"Oh, Heaven!" cried Haywood, as the flames crept closer and closer; "where are my men—will they never come?"

The heat became intense, and under its burning rays their clothing began to scorch. Diaz and Haywood redoubled their efforts to effect an escape.

They had yet several inches to cut with their knives when Isabella's clothing took fire, and she shrieked in wild alarm. Both men sprung to assist her.

Drawing off their coats, they flung them about her, and smothered the flames which were leaping up around her. But in so doing their own garments took fire; and while they were frantically endeavoring to quench the blaze, believing that death was at hand—

"Whoop—hurrah!" a stentorian wild cheer pealed out on the night air, and a body of horsemen galloped out of the forest and up to the house, scattering the guerrillas like sheep.

"The troopers!" cried Haywood, joyfully. "Help, men, help!"

The echoes of his wild appeal were scarcely over, when several troopers plunged into the burning house through the windows, and laying hands upon them hurried them into the open air. They were thrown to the ground and rolled about by rude but friendly hands; and as the roof of the residence fell in with a loud crash, the flames which had but so recently threatened their destruction, were quenched, and they rose to their feet, exhausted and panting for breath, but delivered.

"God be praised!" ejaculated Diaz, fervently.

"Amen!" responded Haywood and Isabella.

CHAPTER VII.

AMBUSCADED AND CAPTURED.

For some time the brains of the rescued ones were bewildered with the sudden and unexpected events which had snatched them from a terrible death and placed them in perfect safety ; and the sudden revulsion was too much for the gentle Isabella, and she swooned in her lover's arms.

While the latter was busily engaged in restoring his lovely burden to consciousness, Diaz warmly expressed his gratitude to Otis, who, hovering about his leader in joy, scarcely heard him. While the blazing ruins of the mansion shed a strong light upon the scene ; while sounds of strife, cries and oaths, came from the adjacent forest, where the gallant troopers were furiously charging the drunken guerrillas who were now in full retreat ; while Diaz poured out his soul in fervent thanksgiving to the Almighty disposer of events, and to the single trooper who tarried beside the rescued ones, the latter, Otis, fluttered about his leader with extravagant demonstrations of joy.

When the beautiful *senorita* regained her consciousness, she immediately, with the ardent temperament of her race, threw herself upon Otis' breast, and hung upon his neck in a transport of gratitude. The trooper blushed like a peony under this sweet torrent of joy and gratefulness ; fearless in war he was a coward before a beautiful woman ; and as an excuse for ridding himself of what though the sweetest music to his ears caused him bashful pain, he hastily disengaged himself and mounting his horse, galloped away to assist his troopers in the forest.

He was met, however, on the border of the wood by the returning troopers, who were coming back one by one. Their jaded steeds, fatigued by a fierce gallop of four leagues upon a week's constant service, were no match for the fresh, agile mustangs of the guerrillas, who soon made their escape.

Gathering round their rescued leader and his companions,

whom they overwhelmed with rough congratulations, the troopers listened while the burning ruins cast a vivid glow over them, to Haywood's narration of their struggle for life in the burning dwelling. Deep denunciations filled the air; and each sturdy trooper registered a vow within his secret breast, a vow of vengeance upon the heartless guerrillas.

After the novelty of the recital and meeting was over, Diaz drew Haywood aside to consult upon the future. His residence was burned down, his *vaqueros* had long since departed for the war, and the Senorita Isabella had now no place to call her home; and he requested Haywood's advice regarding temporary shelter for his daughter.

At that period, Monterey was the capital and chief town of California, and though almost purely a Mexican town was under the jurisdiction of a military *alcalde*, a chaplain in the United States navy, and a man of some mark in American letters—Walter Colton, who, from his generosity and beneficence, was wholly as popular with the Californians as with the Americans. Could this town be reached without further molestation by Marcos Alvarez, a haven for Isabella was ensured, for Diaz had many warm personal friends among the hospitable inhabitants, and the town being in possession of the American troops, Alvarez would be forced to suspend his vindictive attacks, and keep aloof.

In a short time Haywood and Diaz resolved to proceed to Monterey, Haywood accompanying the Spaniards as an escort, and protection against Alvarez, and the journey was to be undertaken as soon as possible.

The capacious barns of San Rafael had fortunately escaped the flames which had destroyed the dwelling, and Diaz' saddle-horse and Isabella's steed were quietly munching their barley within the stalls.

Had not the steeds of the troopers been jaded, the journey would have been commenced immediately; but the troopers as well as their horses were sorely in need of rest, and accordingly the men stabled their horses, guards were posted, and camping down in their blankets soon all were asleep, excepting the sentinels, silently pacing to and fro.

In the morning, after Isabella had partaken of a scanty breakfast from the gleanings of the troopers' haversacks, she

was tossed upon her favorite white pony, and falling into line behind her the troopers took up the march for Monterey, thirty leagues distant. In the course of the morning a trooper had the fortune to kill a deer. Barely halting at noon to snatch a hasty dinner of venison steak they pushed on, hurrying toward their destination.

The shades of night were gathering when they left the broad level plain which they had been traversing, and wended their way toward a chain of rugged mountains which lay between them and Monterey, now eight leagues distant. Beyond these mountains lay the extensive *ranch*o of a warm friend of Diaz, a Spaniard. Here they intended to pass the night, and as the *ranch*o was yet leagues distant, they urged their horses onward and bestowed less attention upon the plains around them than heretofore, they having been watching for the sudden appearance of Marcos Alvarez, who, however, had not been seen, contrary to their expectations.

The sun had disappeared behind the guerulous looking crest of a jagged peak miles away, and as night settled down over the earth, a silence, intense and uncomfortable, ensued. The sounds which are usually heard after sunset in uninhabited places, resounded not through the air. The discordant scream of the nighthawk, the plaintive notes of the whippoorwill, the ceaseless droning of nocturnal insects—all were hushed, all was still.

The steady breeze which before sunset had swept down the plain, was stilled, and not even a zephyr stayed as a reminder of its presence. The foliage on the live-oaks and mountain shrubs drooped languidly in the brooding atmosphere; below the travelers who were now among the lesser mountains, the plain slept in uninterrupted tranquillity; above the yet distant mountains reared their frowning heads, enveloped in shadow; deathly silence reigned over mountain and plain.

Insensibly, a marked melancholy and unaccountable discomposure overshadowed the travelers. Throughout the day jests, rollicking ballads and hearty stories, had been bandied from lip to lip among the troopers. Now all such levities were ceased. The stern faces of the troopers, hitherto relaxed, grew rigid and repellent, and radiated a chilliness

which impregnated the thoughts of even the light hearted Isabella and her good-humored lover. This brooding silence, in conjunction with the somber appearance of the gorges about them, and the ghostly stillness of the atmosphere, augmented this feeling of uneasiness, and before long the whole party were buried in saturnine meditations.

While they were toiling up a rocky gorge which led to the pass, which they were to traverse to penetrate the chain of mountains, Isabella fancied she heard, far away in the solemn recesses of the mountains, directly in the course they were pursuing, a faint, prolonged whistle, succeeded by a shorter one in another direction. Believing that Marcos Alvarez had been persistently dogging them, and acquainted with the guerrillas' signals, she immediately, with the timidity of her sex, apprehended danger, and instantly confided her fears to Will-o'-the-Wisp, who was riding moodily by her side.

"Roland," she whispered, "did you hear that faint whistle, far away?"

Her voice aroused Haywood from his abstraction.

"Whistle! what whistle?" he inquired.

"A whistle far away."

"In what direction?"

"Directly in our course—westward."

"No, I did not. It was some animal doubtless—perhaps a lynx. That creature utters a sound similar to a faint, wheezing whistle."

"No, Roland, you are wrong. Although unacquainted with the peculiarities of wild animals, I am certain it was not the note of one, but a human whistle. Might it not be the guerrillas? Hark! there it is again."

Away in the distant ravines, and in the direction of their course, rose a whistle, distinct at first, then dying away in prolonged, melancholy cadence. The troopers heard the sound and looked askance at their chief, placing their hands significantly upon their carbines.

"Captain—Will-o'-the-Wisp," said Otis, riding to Haywood's side, "did you hear that distant whistle?"

"I did."

"Not wishing to alarm the senorita, and truly begging her pardon," continued the first officer, lifting his green hat with

a clumsy attempt at grace, and blushing with embarrassment —“ not liking to frighten the lady, but I will say : that I’m afraid them guerrillas have rid past us to-day, and are fixing to pounce upon us in some dark gorge ; and if we ain’t careful, I’m dubious we’ll fall into some trap.”

“ But we have seen nothing of Alvarez since your brave fellows routed him so utterly last night,” said Diaz, joining in the conversation ; “ and we have been traversing a plain where we could see for miles on every side. Alvarez could not well dog us without being seen.”

“ True,” replied Haywood. “ But still, I have reason to believe he did not retreat very far, last night, when he found himself out of danger, after my gallant boys (God bless them !) rescued our lives from his bloody revenge, and drove his followers like sheep into the forest. Depend upon it, senor, our slumbers were watched last night, and our plans perhaps overheard by spies. Again, he, from long intimacy with you, undoubtedly knows many if not all of your habits and dispositions. Is it not so ?”

Diaz frowned as he replied in the affirmative.

“ Then,” pursued Haywood, “ knowing you have powerful friends at Monterey, well aware (the villain !) that your residence is destroyed and that your gentle daughter has no resting-place for her head—what more likely than he should anticipate this journey, and ferment his diabolical conceptions accordingly. It requires no extra brain to do this— Hark ! the whistle again.”

As he was thus interrupted in his lucid arguments, the ominous whistle again sounded, then died away, filling the distant glens with its wild, mournful cadence. Night had now entirely fallen over the mountains ; but their rocky, sinuous path was lighted up by the pale rays of a full moon in the eastern horizon, which, while its light aided their passage, cast grotesque and deep shadows athwart the gorges, creating favorable places for ambuscades at almost every step.

For several minutes the party wound slowly through the defile in silence, each being occupied with his own meditations. Isabella timidly sought her lover’s side, and rode slowly between her father and Haywood, as if apprehending

immediate danger, and sheltering herself where she knew she would be protected.

Suddenly Haywood, who was slightly in the advance, reined in his steed and quietly pointed westward, where the defile widened, the walls became higher and more precipitous, and forbidding mountains loomed aloft on every side.

They were in the heart of the mountains, and at the entrance of the pass.

"Men," said Haywood, in a low tone, "yonder the pass stretches away, which, in several hours, will bring us out into the Salinas plains and close to the Salinas river, where we propose to spend the night. If we are to be attacked to-night, it will be in this pass, where space is scanty, and we will be laboring under great disadvantage. See: yonder are dense chaparrals, shadowy dells, enormous rocks everywhere, all around us—excellent places for an ambuscade. As we go further down the pass, the thickets will grow denser, the surface more broken, and the pass deeper, and the danger will increase. Therefore, look well to your arms; watch closely every thicket, rock and shadow, for enemies may be lurking where we least expect them. Otis, keep closely by my side. If aught happens to me, protect the senorita."

"My life is at the lady's service," murmured Otis, gallantly tipping his hat, and blushing violently.

The words were scarcely uttered when the deep silence was broken by the loud reports of many carbines, from among the rocks on both sides of the pass, and a storm of bullets whistled over the troopers' heads, mingled with fierce cries from the unseen foes.

"The guerrillas!" cried Haywood. "Stand firmly, men!"

As he spoke, a series of Mexican yells pealed out from the rocky mountain-sides, and the next moment they were surrounded by a score of guerrillas, brandishing their wicked, long knives.

The troopers poured a hot volley into their assailants, then grasping their knives, met them hand to hand. Haywood threw himself in front of Isabella, in order to shield her from the fierce assault, swinging his saber in readiness to strike.

Directly following the sudden onslaught of the Mexicans, a powerful guerrilla—the same who had saved Alvarez' life on a former occasion—urged his horse behind Haywood, with his dark eye bent upon the trooper's powerful form. Never heeding the progress of the strife, which raged furiously, he loosed his lasso from its loggerhead, and whirling it over his head, lanced it toward Will-o'-the-Wisp, with deliberate aim.

The noose settled over Haywood's neck as he was in the act of repelling the furious assault of Marcos Alvarez, who was urging his horse through the fray toward him. The lassoer uttered a short cry of gratification as he perceived the success of his aim, and wheeling his horse, prepared to retreat.

The lasso tightened round Haywood's neck, as the guerrilla, with a smile of triumph, spurred his horse down the gorge. Haywood was violently jerked from his saddle upon the cruel rocks, and unseen by aught saving the now frantic senorita, was roughly dragged, insensible, and bleeding in many places, into a dangerous captivity, while the strife still raged between the hostile bands, the troopers, in the heat and excitement of the fight, being unaware of their leader's capture.

CHAPTER VIII.

PUSS IN THE CORNER.

A SANGUINARY conflict seemed likely to ensue between the Americans and the guerrillas, but the Mexicans, having made their furious onslaught, retreated, with their national discretion, behind rocks, trees and thickets, whence they poured volley after volley toward their enemies. But in their impetuous desire to eradicate the troopers, they exemplified the terse saying, "Haste and waste;" for, taking but hurried aims, their bullets, without an exception, either whizzed over the Americans' heads, or plowed the ground at their feet.

For several moments the troopers were flurried and thrown into disorder by the rattling of fire-arms from their unseen foes, while they themselves were fully exposed to view against the wall of the gorge, which was brilliantly illuminated by the moon.

To augment their confusion, Haywood, on whom they relied, was nowhere visible. They missed the ringing voice which always cheered them on to battle, and felt adrift without their leader.

Otis, faithful to Haywood's charge, had interposed his burly body between Isabella and the fire, and absorbed in shielding her, had allowed his attention to wander from the troopers, of whom, from Haywood's inexplicable disappearance, he was now the leader. But every moment the confusion increased among them; they evinced an inclination to beat a hasty, disorderly flight; and Otis, perceiving that they only needed a leader to restore them to complete order, passed Isabella into Diaz' arms, and spurred his horse to the front, crying:

"At 'em, men—follow me—charge!"

Although his command was not to be found in the manual of arms, it was none the worse for its deficiency; for the troopers, with a stirring huzza, followed Otis, who was urging his horse up the opposite ascent, where the Mexicans lay hidden.

Fortunately for Otis' followers, the Mexicans, in their random fire, had emptied their carbines and revolvers, otherwise the troopers would have been greatly thinned by the most reckless volley, at the close quarters into which they were plunging. The Mexicans now had recourse to their knives, few of them possessing swords; and unsheathing their weapons, they awaited the troopers' onslaught.

Alvarez, swinging his saber above his head, stood in the most exposed position, exhorting his men to stand firm, reminding them of the great advantage they possessed in being concealed from their enemies. But his gaze flitted ever and anon beyond the troopers, where Isabella was sitting on her palfrey, closely guarded by Senor Diaz. Both were absorbed in the approaching strife.

To meet with the guerrillas, the Americans were obliged

to urge their tired horses up a steep, rocky ascent, which their steeds, jaded and unaccustomed to scaling mountain-sides, found a slow, laborious task, whereas the fresh Spanish horses, used to clambering among the mountains, had easily surmounted the ascent.

The majority of the troopers failed to accomplish the ascent, and their horses, slipping and tumbling, backed down into the gorge again, while their exasperated riders plied the spurs without mercy. The few who had gained the summit of the ridge, at beholding their companions' failure, also fell back to their original position, though with great reluctance.

At the miscarriage of the charge, the Mexicans, seizing their carbines and revolvers, commenced to load them with the utmost dispatch, taunting, as they did so, the awkwardness of the Americans. Marcos Alvarez smiled derisively as the last trooper backed sullenly down into the gorge below, and he could not forbear an exultant jeer.

"Americanos, bravos! how furious was your charge—how successful! We laugh, amused with your ferocity and the perfect horsemanship of your *cavalleros*. Bravo Americano—try once again."

The Mexicans, having charged their weapons, resumed their firing, aiming with more deliberation than previously, though still with great inaccuracy. Several bullets, however, whizzed among the scattered troopers, dangerously close, and Otis, aware that a charge was useless, and the Mexicans could not be dislodged, sounded the retreat.

With true American aversion to retreat, the troopers obeyed slowly and with much reluctance, although they were under too good discipline to disobey. Whatever motives of timidity they ascribed to Otis were soon dissipated, for the sturdy lieutenant, having ensconced his band behind a dense chaparral at the entrance to the pass, safe from the Mexican bullets, addressed his men thus tersely:

"We can't dislodge them, men, for they are too strongly posted. They hold the bowers, but our hand is chuck-full of trumps."

"I don't see it," said a trooper, discontentedly. "'Pears like they hold every thing."

"You bet they do!" assented several.

"They've cotched our Jack, and that's the cap'n," said a surly-looking man. "I don't see him nowhere, and I'll bet he's gone up the spout."

"We've no time to whimper over spilt milk," said Otis, hurriedly. "If he's gone, he *is* gone, and there the matter ends. None of you will mourn his loss more than I, you may bet your lives; but we will postpone it until we have our revenge on the greasers, which, if I'm not mistaken, will come to pass right shortly."

"How 're we going to do it?" demanded several, incredulously.

"How? Why, in this manner: we'll lie right here in ambush, and after a bit the greasers, reckoning we have fled down the mountain, will pursue. When they come into the narrow entrance yonder, galloping by, we'll pepper 'em."

"It is indeed an excellent place for an ambuscade," said Senor Diaz, looking about. "It could not well be better."

In truth, it seemed as if the Almighty, foreseeing this event, had constructed the entrance to the pass especially for an ambuscade.

The troopers were posted behind a dense chaparral, extending half-way across the entrance to the canon, which was narrow. The rest of the entrance (like the vacant space of a half-open door) was utterly devoid of foliage, and the vivid moonlight streaming down without impediment, illuminated it with almost solar clearness. The chaparral lay in the dense shade of the gorge's south wall, beneath which were the Americans. Not one of them could be discerned from the open space by the keenest eyes; while a mouse could not enter the canon without being clearly visible.

Ensconced there, in the snuggest of ambushments, the troopers awaited the coming of the Mexicans. They were drawn up in a single rank with Diaz and Isabella in the rear. Each trooper held his carbine ready-cocked to his shoulder, and, in readiness to fire at the signal, listened for the 'guerrillas' approach.

But whoever of them anticipated an immediate denouement were disappointed, for many minutes passed and not a sound disturbed the tranquillity of the night; saving, per-

chance, the boding hoot of an owl perched on a dead tree close by, staring down upon the concealed troopers with astonishment. But when several, tired of inaction, had lowered their carbines, a voice cried, down the gorge in the direction of the guerrillas :

"They are indeed gone. Mount, men, and pursue, and do you each recollect : no quarter except to the senorita."

The voice was in the Spanish tongue and none of the Americans had any difficulty in recognizing it as that of Marcos Alvarez. At the ominous mention of her, Isabella shuddered and drew closer to Diaz, who clasped her to his side but said nothing.

Directly following the command, a variety of sounds arose from the distant Mexicans, and the metallic ring of hoots upon rocks, the clanking of steel and the rustling of bushes, all proclaimed to the troopers that their foes were entering the trap.

The Americans now settled themselves firmly in their saddles, sitting like statues. Isabella felt horribly fascinated by the quiet but terrible scene, the result of the ambushade. A troop of horsemen would suddenly gallop out of shadow into vivid moonlight ; a roar of firearms would then deafen her ; and many horses would career madly down the canon, with empty saddles and swinging stirrups, while their riders were floundering in death-throes. Could any playwright have better field for clap-trap—could theatrical effect be more startling and graphic ? Only when Melpomene shakes off the shackles of custom.

The guerrillas approached gradually, their progress being necessarily slow among the rocks and impediments of the sinuous gorge. The Americans could hear Alvarez angrily urging his men to greater speed, his exhortations being mingled with deep imprecations at their slow progress and maledictions upon the troopers, already, as he supposed, speeding down the mountain side far away.

Finally the Mexicans emerged into more open ground, for the sharp sounds of galloping hoofs rung up and down the gorge. But suddenly they halted, and a whispering ensued among them.

The hearts of the troopers throbbed with anxiety, for the

guerrillas apparently dreaded or suspected an ambuscade. Glimpses of them could be caught through the chaparral by several of the troopers. They were still some distance down the moonlit gorge, and were huddled together whispering, and pointing frequently to the place of ambush.

What had alarmed them? Had a stray moonbeam, filtered through the tree-tops and glancing upon a bit of steel, perchance the mountings of a carbine or scabbard, thus flashed out a warning?—or had a horse inadvertently stamped? Neither, that the Americans were aware of.

Some occult warning had been given the guerrillas, however, and their advance or retreat evidently hung by a feather's weight. The few troopers who possessed eye-holes in the foliage through which they could survey them, observed, that Alvarez seemed to be angrily ordering an immediate advance, while his subordinates openly rebelled. It was a leader's influence *versus* inclination.

The latter prevailed. Men have an instinctive dread of approaching the suspected position of a hidden enemy. Mysterious fear is more potent than absolute terror, when you thoroughly analyse the two degrees of apprehension, however absurd the statement may seem. Fear born of mystery, is a demon to which all men succumb.

The Mexicans, therefore, refused to advance, and sat in the saddles in the bolt-erectness of obstinacy. Alvarez brandished his saber to no purpose and his fiercest threats were wasted; not a guerrilla would budge.

"Cowards!" he cried at last, thoroughly enraged. "Since you dare not pass yonder chimisal because it is black and silent, I, your leader, will set you the example, and when you behold me ride by unharmed will you not sink with humiliation? Car r-ramba!"

Dashing his spurs against his horse's flanks he whirled his saber, and galloped toward the narrow outlet of the pass.

"Men," whispered Otis, suddenly, "we must take Alvarez alive. You four to the right, must try to kill his horse. The rest of you will dash out, surround, and capture him."

He had scarcely issued his hurried directions, when Alvarez came galloping toward them, swinging his saber defiantly. His matinous men, deploring his temerity, closely watching

him, saw him gallop into the illuminated entrance. Immediately a stream of fire blazed in the chimisal, a loud report rung up and down the gorge, and Alvarez' horse fell dead to the ground, hurling his daring rider headlong. Alvarez rose speedily, but only to find himself a prisoner in the hands of the Americans, who suddenly appeared as if they had risen from the earth.

Before the Mexicans recovered their wits (for they were a tounded, notwithstanding they had suspected a similar result) a body of troopers spurred down upon them with ringing huzzas. Bereft of their leader, the Mexicans gazed irresolutely at each other for a moment, then turned and clattered down the pass in full retreat.

The troopers would have pursued them hotly, but a loud recall from Otis caused them to turn and retrace their steps, after a parting ineffectual volley toward the flying guerrillas.

When they returned to the entrance, they found Marcos Alvarez bound firmly with his own horse-hair lariat, which had been taken from his lifeless horse close by. He was surrounded by the troopers and their charges who were striving to force him to answer a question which they fiercely asked. But the Mexicans' swarthy face wore an expression of mulish obstinacy and savage implacability, which indicated his resolve not to give his captors any satisfaction.

"Again I ask you, where is Captain Haywood?" demanded Otis, as the troopers came up. But the guerrilla's eyes were bent to the ground; he was evidently determined to throw no light on Haywood's disappearance.

"Marcos Alvarez," said Senor Diaz, advancing and confronting the guerrilla, "if any one had told me, one short month ago, that your true character was that of a desperado, murderer, I would have considered you grievously mangled. I received you into my house and encouraged your suit for my daughter's hand, convinced that you would prove a worthy husband. But how you have revealed your real character, you know only too well. I do not come to reprove you or to endeavor to persuade you to renounce your bloody career, for all reproaches and persuasions will be lost on you; but tell these soldiers if you know—tell them I entreat you, where Captain Haywood is to be found."

The guerrilla looked angrily up, and darting a glance of savage triumph at Isabella, said :

"The noble captain is called, I believe, by the unique *sobriquet* of Will-o' the-Wisp. If I mistake not, the evanescent twinkler from which he is named, has a trick of disappearing at critical junctures. What more natural than that the noble captain might have vanished likewise. It is not for me to explain where the *ignis fatuus* goes to when it disappears—how should I be aware of the whereabouts of your noble captain ?"

"You are inclined to make the occasion a travesty, Marcos Alvarez," said Diaz, sternly ; "but surely a person of your perceptions can read the frowns which are bent upon you by these soldiers. Are you aware, sir, that your life hangs by a hair—that at a gesture from their temporary leader, the soldiers would soon make you a quivering corpse ?"

Alvarez preserved haughty silence.

"See here, greaser," said a trooper, dismounting and grasping Alvarez roughly by the shoulder ; "do you know where you are standing ? On slippery ground, by thunder—take care you don't fall. In other words, mind your eye, or you will be hung at the end of your own lasso. Now, where's the captain ? Spit it out !"

Alvarez answered him with a curl of his quivering lip. In his rage at being rudely handled, he would have struck the trooper to the ground, but his arms were bound at elbow and wrist behind his back, and he was forced to bear the trooper's rudeness. But he made no reply.

"Take his riata from his saddle, one of you !" said Otis, pointing to the dead horse.

Several eagerly sprung to obey the order.

When the lasso was placed in his hands, Otis flung out the coil and slipped the dead-eye ; then, passing the noose over the guerrilla's head, he drew it moderately taut, leaving the prisoner room to breathe.

"Will you now tell where the captain is ?" he asked.

"Caramba ! no," replied Alvarez.

"Pass the riata over yonder limb !" commanded Otis, pointing to an adjacent oak. His order was quickly obeyed

by three men, who grasped the free end of the lasso, ready to launch the Mexican into mid-air.

"Now will you tell?" asked Otis. "Do so, and you remain a prisoner of war; refuse, and you will be swung into eternity."

But the guerrilla made no response.

"Pull!" cried Otis; but before they could execute his order, the senorita, who had been a silent spectator, sprung forward and placed her hand upon the riata.

"Would you, then, take God's law into your own hands?" she demanded of the troopers.

"We must obey orders, senorita," said the nearest, respectfully but firmly.

She turned to Otis.

"Do you really intend to take his life?" she asked, fixing her dark, earnest eyes upon him.

He colored, but replied:

"Senorita, he deserves instant execution; but he has a chance for life."

"How?"

"By revealing the whereabouts of Captain Haywood."

At this reply, she turned pale and reeled slightly. She would have cheerfully given her right hand to have been assured of her lover's safety; she would have forgiven Marcos Alvarez his wicked intentions toward her and her loved ones, if he would have made truthful reply; but that was not to be.

"Let justice take its course, my child," interposed Diaz. "He has been a wicked, desperate man—his crimes are manifold; do not interfere, Isabella."

"And you, too, father, would sanction his execution. Oh, father!"

The troopers became impatient.

"Shall we hoist away, sir," asked one, itching to launch the guerrilla into mid-air.

"Yes," replied Diaz. "Isabella, stand aside."

"We must, senorita," said Otis, firmly. "We must either force the confession from him, or fulfill our vows. Up with him, men."

But Isabella snatched a knife from the nearest trooper's

belt, and sprung to the riata, just as the men were hoisting Alvarez from the ground. Seizing the lasso, she cried :

“ Stop instantly, or I will sever the riata ! ” The troopers ceased drawing, but eyed her sullenly. As they paused, she confronted Alvarez, who was gasping for breath.

“ You have had a foretaste of death,” she cried. “ Now save your life by giving them the information they desire.”

“ Give you—*you*—information of *his* position ? ” hissed Alvarez, enraged. “ Senorita, kill me or not, as you choose ; but you will never again behold your American lover.”

Otis made a covert signal to the troopers.

Throwing their combined weight and strength into the act, they ran from the tree, and Marcos Alvarez was kicking and gasping in mid-air.

The shout of triumph which the troopers uttered, was speedily followed by one of astonishment, discomfiture and anger. In their absorption they had not noticed that the Mexicans had returned, and headed by a giant guerrilla, were cautiously coming up the gorge. They drew near, nearer, unheeded by the troopers, who were intent upon executing their prisoner ; and as the guerrilla chief was dangling in the air, the giant guerrilla suddenly galloped into their midst under the swinging body.

He paused there only an instant. Three sharp reports rung out down the gorge, and the three hangmen fell dead, while Alvarez dropped into the guerrilla's arms. Without a moment's delay, the rescuer put spurs to his horse and galloped at great speed down the gorge.

The entire rescue was so rapidly performed, that when the troopers regained their wits, and started to pursue the defeated yet successful guerrillas, they were out of sight and hearing, leaving three bloody bodies as their mark.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GUERRILLA'S REVENGE.

WHEN Haywood regained his senses, the morning sun was kissing the summits of the mountains, and the jovial larks were sweetly caroling in the tree-tops. The gloom and silence of night had departed, giving place to bright and merry day; and dazzled by the radiance of the sun which blazed in his eyes, a considerable interval elapsed ere Haywood could muster his disbanded faculties, and endeavor to ascertain his position.

When at last his thoughts were sufficiently rejuvenated as it were, he found that he was in an uncomfortable position. He was bound securely hand and foot. His spine twinged, the effects of the cruel lasso, which he vaguely remembered snatched him from his horse in the heat of the battle. He was torn and bleeding, sore and bruised in many sensitive portions of his body; and weakened and jarred by the shock of the lasso upon the spinal column, his head swam painfully and his brain reeled, incapable of any degree of clear reflection.

Casting his eyes about, he perceived that he was lying upon his back in a place which bore not the slightest resemblance to the gorge wherein he had been captured. He was in a small sequestered glen overhung with beetling precipices, and crowded with gnarled and dense trees which rendered it, together with the towering cliffs on every side, of almost nocturnal gloom. Masses of detached rock were piled about helter-skelter; a babbling brook wound its querulous way through the center of the glen, making quiet, weird music for the languid foliage to tremble in ghastly measure; he was evidently in a fastness of the mountains.

Looking about him still more minutely, he perceived at the lower extremity of the glen, a party of men breakfasting about a dying fire, whom he instantly recognized as the guerrillas. An unusual gloom seemed to pervade the party;

naturally sullen and saturnine, their swarthy visages wore an expression of dormant ferocity, while the countenance of Marcos Alvarez, who sat fully in Haywood's view, was corrugated with baffled fury and delayed revenge.

Was this sullen demeanor, so vividly in contrast with Mexican volubility and vivacity, consequent upon a signal victory achieved by Haywood's troopers?

The latter hoped so, and the thrill of soldierly pride which shot through his racked frame, compensated in some degree for his having fallen into the unmerciful clutches of his arch-enemy, from whom he anticipated brutal treatment, insult and injury.

He had probably lain in an unchanged position during the entire night, as he felt cramped and stiffened; and desiring to change his recumbent attitude for one more restful and easier, he endeavored to rise, but in vain. The movement, slight as it was, attracted the attention of Alvarez, who, perceiving his captive had awakened from his insensibility, left his meal and strode toward him.

Standing over Haywood, a wild smile played about the Mexican's thin, cruel lips, as he gazed with joy upon his hated rival now wholly at his disposition; and the expression of the smile boded no good to the captive trooper.

"Dog of an American," he said, savagely, "do you know what and where you are?"

Haywood returned his ferocious gaze with one of contempt, but made no reply.

"Speak, American 'coyote!'" commanded the Mexican; "do you know what and where you are?"

"I am a prisoner of war, and in the custody of Marcos Alvarez," replied Haywood, calmly.

"You are in the custody of Marcos Alvarez, but by no means a prisoner of war, American bound," replied the guerrilla, still bending his triumphant gaze upon his captive.

"If not a prisoner of war, what then am I?" demanded Haywood. "I was captured in legitimate and open warfare, and as a participant in such I am entitled to exchange."

"Exchange you shall have, never fear," said the guerrilla, with an expression of passionate gratification visible in the depraved lineaments of his dark face; "exchanged you will

be, and into quarters which you will scarcely relish. You are not a prisoner of war, American dog, but the private captive of the independent soldier Marcos Alvarez, who will dispose of you as he sees fit, unfettered by any military regulations. You will never again dally with your brazen-faced, hot-loving senorita, you base betrayer of maidens."

At this coarse and slanderous allusion to Isabella, Haywood became drunk with fury, and writhed madly upon the ground striving to burst his bonds and repay the degraded guerrilla's insult; but Alvarez had taken pains to bind his captive with pieces of the toughest *riata*, and his bonds defied his mad efforts.

When he at last desisted through sheer exhaustion, Alvarez plucked a jagged cudjel from the ground, and dashed it down into Haywood's face with a loud imprecation, laying open the cheek, for several inches cleft to the bone. Then, as his unfortunate captive still eyed him with angry defiance through the blood that streamed down his face, he said with his demoniacal smile:

"Be quiet hereafter, hound, or you will receive more of the same sort. Your distorted and bloody face would charm your hot-blooded *dulcinea* at this moment—its beauty and symmetry are captivating even to male eyes. You would give worlds to gain your feet and kill me, now, would you not, you false lover? We would have a raging tiger rampant in this quiet glen."

"If I were unrestrained for the space of one minute," gasped Haywood, in impotent wrath, "I would free the world of a villain who defames innocent maidens and insults helpless prisoners who can not chastise his insolence. Smile on, scoundrel—smile down upon your prisoner, safe from his anger; but a day of reckoning will come, as you will discover to your grief. Great God! if I were only free."

Again he struggled with his bonds. The subordinates around the fire, attracted by the scuffle, left their meal and clustered about him, jeering and mocking his efforts. He saw no mercy in the swarthy, depraved faces bent upon him, and he expected none; and maddened by the insult upon his betrothed's fair name, struggled to free himself, but vainly.

“Comrades,” said Alvarez, addressing his ruffianly followers in a tone of coarse sarcasm, which was more terrible than his previous ebullition of passion, inasmuch as it vaguely veiled an undercurrent of implacable fury—“here you behold the brave and brilliant warrior, Will-o’-the-Wisp, whose renown, radiant as the sun, various as the silvery ripples of a flashing river, and lasting as the Butte of Shasta, will enrich the annals of posterity. Comrades, you should feel highly honored at the distinction you have gained by his capture; you should, and doubtless do. Now, comrades, as this famous and daring soldier has condescended to visit our humble camp, in what manner shall he be entertained as suitable to his lofty rank? Shall we hang, shoot, or burn him?”

The sudden transition from broad sarcasm to deadly earnestness, caused a savage imprecation of delight to round the circle of scowling Mexicans, who delighted in clap-trap and effect. They were, without perhaps a single exception, banditti, desperadoes, thieves and outlaws, assembled into an organized band for the triple delights of bloodshed, rapine, and sensual gratification. A human life had no value in their estimation—it was a mere shadow, of no worth to its possessor, to be preserved or destroyed as suited their convenience. They were quite willing to execute any command that their chief might give, and they hesitated in sheer irresolution as to the best means of disposing of their prisoner.

“There are a variety of ways of disposing of his greatness,” resumed Alvarez, calmly. “We can practice on him at long range with our carbines; we can exercise ourselves in casting the dagger; we can perfect ourselves in the use of the lasso, or we can burn him, leave him to starve, or bury him alive. Comrades, I leave it to you—which shall we do?”

As the guerrilla gave utterance to these fiendish propositions, which could only emanate from a depraved heart and a devilish brain, Haywood’s heart sunk, and he prepared to meet his God. Determination was plainly visible in the Mexican’s dark and lowering face—every lineament revealed his inflexibility. Haywood saw only too plainly that his death was assured, and the subordinates only awaited their

leader's final plan for execution ; and he breathed a silent but fervent prayer.

At this juncture, while Alvarez seemed to be revolving in his mind the many means of death, in order to cull the most horrible from the ghastly stock, the undecided executioners were joined by a small, slender Mexican, whose coarse and straight hair of jetty blackness, small, glittering eyes of the same saturnine hue, and aquiline nose, betrayed his Indian origin. His scanty garb was coarser than that of his companions, and as he hovered on the confines of the grim circle his deferential and subdued manner evinced his low rank of menial in the band.

Alvarez turned upon the half-breed sharply.

"Garcia, why do you come here?" he demanded, angrily.

"Senor Capitan," returned the half-breed, "curiosity and—"

"Curiosity!" echoed Alvarez, enraged. "Whelp, were you not commanded to guard the upper entrance to the glen? Why do you desert your post, thereby exposing us to a surprise by the Americans? Speak, dog!"

"Senor Capitan," replied the half-breed, humbly, "I have been incessantly at work and have eaten no food for four and twenty hours. I became faint, and was sinking with exhaustion, and came to request you to place in my stead—"

With an oath, Alvarez sprung upon the delinquent, and hurled him to the earth with the same cudjel that had wounded Haywood. As Garcia, with one eye nearly torn from its socket by the jagged limb, lay gasping in pain and exhaustion upon the ground, Alvarez unsheathed his saber and shouted, savagely :

"To your feet, dog! Get back to your deserted post. And if ever again you abandon it without permission, you will meet the fate of all rebellious sentinels—death. Back to your post, I say!"

The half-breed slowly rose, every joint trembling in excitement. His savage face gleamed with suppressed fury, and he scowled fiercely upon Alvarez—a scowl which boded no good to the guerrilla chief. But he said, humbly, as he wiped the blood from his lacerated eye :

"Your command shall be obeyed, Senor Capitan."

Turning, he slowly moved back toward his deserted post. As he slunk along by the side of a babbling brook and threaded his way through the detached thickets toward his destination, Alvarez, who stood scowling after him, saw the dark hand play convulsively about the handle of a dagger which rested in his leathern belt. He beckoned to the huge guerilla who captured Haywood.

"Francisco," he whispered, peering from the corner of his eye at the receding half-breed, "follow him and remain by his side until I relieve you. It is not best that he should witness what I am about to do with the American. In revenge he might liberate him."

Francisco nodded acquiescence and strode after the half breed, who had now disappeared in the chaparral. Waiting until Francisco, too, had vanished from sight, Alvarez again turned to Haywood.

"Place him upon his feet!" he commanded his men. Several grasped him and supported him in an erect position. Alvarez placed his hand roughly upon his captive's broad shoulder.

"Now, American dog!" he said, "attend to me. See yonder hillside—see that hole near the base of the hill, just beyond the brook?"

Haywood looked in the direction indicated. Across the brook, and about one hundred yards distant was a knoll, yellow with protracted drought and wholly devoid of verdure, saving perhaps, a few decayed clumps of the wild sage which rendered its surface still more bleak and bare. Near the base of the knoll and close to a mass of large rocks which at some time had fallen from the cliffs above, was a large aperture, several feet in diameter, caused by the waters of a torrent which long ago had dashed into the glen. This aperture or cave was of small dimension, as even at the distance at which Haywood stood, he could faintly distinguish its further extremity.

"Do you see?" repeated Alvarez.

"I see," replied Haywood, calmly.

"It is well!" resumed Alvarez, with quiet emphasis, "for it is your grave—there you will be imprisoned—buried alive,

and left to perish by the lonely, protracted sufferings of starvation."

Haywood started in alarm at the horrible revelation of the Mexican's intentions, and although the fearful prospect could not fail to fill him with fear, he yet controlled himself and preserved his unmoved face and calm demeanor, awaiting further proceedings.

"Leave us for a moment—I desire a brief conversation with the American," said Alvarez to his guerrillas. They reluctantly retired to the fire, eying Haywood with bloody greed.

"Dog!" hissed Alvarez, bending his face, now distorted with rage and revenge, close to the calm, immovable one of Haywood—"I once loved a young and beautiful girl—loved her passionately and with all my strength. She loved me in return, and was to have been my bride ere this, when you with your American hypocrisy, dissimulations and false promises, forced her love from me. You have done that which a man of Spanish blood never forgets or forgives: you have by false means stolen my bride. For that, American dog, meet your fearful fate in yonder sepulcher; and when in your death agonies you shriek for help, for mercy, no one will hear your cries. In ten minutes, I and my band will have left this glen far behind. We go to seize your hot-loving senorita, to be the forced and unwilling bride of Marcos Alvarez. Then reflect on her miserable fate, for she shall be repaid for her treachery, and repaid terribly. Then shriek and tear your lips with your frantic teeth. Howl in agony. Your death will be a lingering one with only the beasts of the mountains to hear your last cries, and to howl back devilish replies. Have you any thing to say to the last person your false eyes will ever rest upon, American dog?"

"Nothing," replied Haywood, calmly. His face was pale but composed, and his nerves were as steady as ever though his heart beat slow and faintly. He was facing a terrible, inevitable death, and he resolved to meet it with the fortitude of a soldier.

The dark features of the Mexican gleamed with disappointment as he noted the stoicism with which his captive faced his death. He had expected to enjoy and gloat over piteous

appeals for mercy, frenzied supplications for life. He received a calm, imperturbable demeanor, and the highest degree of moral and physical courage.

Taking Haywood upon his shoulders, he strode toward the cave signing for his guerrillas to follow. Entering the cave, he placed Haywood, still helplessly bound, upon the floor of his terrible sepulcher, then with a last glance of ferocity, triumph and gratified revenge, stalked out.

Smiling in victorious joy he stood by while his guerrillas with difficulty rolled large rocks into the cavern's entrance, completely blocking it; and he only desisted when he was satisfied that nothing save the combined and fully-exerted strength of half a dozen men could free his prisoner.

Then the guerrillas quietly mounted their horses, and following their triumphant chief, rode away down the mountain side; and in ten minutes the only creature in the glen was a man, bound hand and foot, imprisoned within the walls of a narrow cave, with no possible means of extricating himself from his horrible position—abandoned to die a lonely, lingering, terrible death; death by fatigue and starvation.

All day long the glen, the hill, the cave—all were silent. As the shades of night fell around the glen, and settled over mountain and plain, shrieks of anguish arose from the bowels of the knoll. Then deep, horrible groans. Then at midnight faint gasping sighs. Afterward came intense silence.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER VICTIM.

THE time is two days later.

The loss sustained by the guerrillas in their encounter with Haywood's troopers was small, comprising two men killed. The troopers had routed their assailants, who fled through the mountain gorges a short time after Haywood's capture.

They had assembled in the glen where Haywood recovered his consciousness. We have narrated their proceedings there, and will now follow them as they ride down the mountains, in search of Alvarez' prey.

The chief and his gigantic lieutenant rode in advance, while the guerrillas followed in an irregular line. Behind them all rode the half-breed, Garcia, with a fixed scowl upon his savage face, his eyes bent angrily upon Alvarez, and his slender fingers convulsively toying with the hilt of his long, keen dagger. His chest rose and fell spasmodically, as if some ill-suppressed passion or desire was raging under the broad and lusty breast; his lips quivered and his eyes glittered; he was plainly agitated.

He suffered his horse to loiter, and while the guerrillas rode briskly on down the mountain, he continually but gradually slackened his speed until his companions were lost to view among the distant recesses of the forest. Then he entirely halted, and after listening keenly for a moment and casting a searching glance about him, he suddenly snatched his dagger from its sheath, and flourishing it above his head for a moment, drove it downward through space as if striking a deadly blow into the heart of a hated foe.

"Curse you!" he gasped in a hoarse whisper, glaring toward the bushes behind which his comrades had vanished, and striking right and left with his dagger. "Marcos Alvarez, may you suffer ten thousand deaths. May the fiends of Hades burn to possess you. May the vultures in the sky greed after you. May your sleep be tormented with frightful visions; and may—"

He paused and inhaled a long breath as if to collect force for another and more violent curse. His lacerated eye, affected by his passion, commenced to bleed sullenly. He smeared some of the blood upon his knife's glittering blade, and tossing the weapon aloft with a menacing movement in the direction of the guerrillas, uttered the conclusion of his curse.

"May the blood upon this knife, the blood that you have shed, make the knife thirst to enter your foul body. May it mix with the black blood of your heart; and if my vengeance fails, may you live for a century, every day a hell of

remorse, every night a congregation of the spirits of the men you have murdered."

The extreme violence of his rage for the moment mastered him. His grasp upon the dagger, vise like before, now relaxed, and his arm fell passively by his side. His breast heaved turbulently; his eyes filled with the tears which are shed by such men only when in a state of violent agitation, while the blood from his torn eye flowed in a trickling stream down his dark, passion-swelled face; and his whole frame for a time was lax and exhausted.

His prostration was of brief duration. Soon the old gleam returned to his eyes, the tension to his muscles, and spurring his horse he cased his bloody dagger, and galloped to overtake his companions. As he sped through the forest-aisles he took from his haversack a few morsels of meat which he had stolen from the abandoned camp-fire. The food (he had eaten nothing for twenty four hours) was swallowed voraciously, and seemed to create new vigor in his lithe and tough frame, and when he reined in his horse behind the guerrillas, a look of surprise at his sudden recuperation passed among the men.

Alvarez was riding in advance in accordance with his custom, but whereas he had been hitherto conversing freely with Francisco, he was now silent and moody. Garcia, with the blind superstition of his savage ancestry, smiled internally as he marked his chief's moodiness, and he muttered:

"Is the curse on the track yet so soon, Marcos Alvarez--do you feel a fore-shadowing of evil and danger? Rest awhile, scoundrel--rest awhile."

At this instant Alvarez turned in his saddle, and cast his eyes back upon the band with a sternness that caused Gracia to shrink behind a guerrilla, fancying his inarticulate speech had been overheard or divined by Alvarez. But his suspicion was without foundation; after a brief glance over his men the chief again turned his gaze to the front. He had been merely reckoning his force.

"Francisco," said Alvarez, beckoning to his second. The guerrilla was at his side in a moment.

"Well, Senor Capitan?"

"Francisco, besides us two officers, the band numbers fifteen. You say the Americans lost three in the last engagement?"

"If I mistake not, capitan."

"That reduced their force to eight, about half our number. Now their leader is gone, ha! ha! we ought surely to defeat them."

"Surely!" echoed Francisco, with an oath. "American dogs! we should hang them if we catch them, capitan."

"It shall be done!" said Alvarez, fiercely.

They had hitherto been pursuing the gentle declension of a mountain spur, which stretched gracefully down into a crystal river; but now Alvarez abandoned the easy declivity, and veering off into a dense chaparral, reined his horse down a steep bank which only the steadiness of the animal enabled him to pass in safety.

Now their path was rough and rocky, winding in and out among dense thickets, rounding gigantic trees and passing along the verge of beetling precipices. For half an hour they cautiously picked their way along until the path became suddenly smoother, the thickets grew scantier, and in a few moments they halted on a broad level ledge, or platform, which being situated on the crest of a small but isolated peak, commanded an extensive view of the entire country, which lay before them like a map.

Simultaneously with their emergence upon the platform, Francisco uttered an ejaculation and hastily pointed to the country below.

The platform was upon the brink of a precipice, which after a perpendicular descent of nearly a thousand feet, terminated in a spacious gorge, whose surface was covered with masses of detached rocks which lay piled helter-skelter about as they happened to fall from the cliffs above. Directly in the gorge beneath the guerrillas, but so far down that they seemed but pigmies, half a dozen horsemen were picking their way slowly along in and about the rocks and trees, and riding westward. Behind them, and distant a mile or more, was a still smaller party of three, following the advance horsemen, and being stragglers, apparently, of the same band, and proceeding so slowly that it required a

steady, keen gaze by the guerrillas to convince them they were moving.

Alvarez drew a small field-glass from his pocket, and turned it upon the two parties. As his gaze rested upon the rear and smaller band, his eyes flashed and he passed the glass to Francisco.

"Yonder is our prey," he said, quietly; "what do you see, Francisco?"

"I see," replied the officer, "a *senorita* on a white horse. She is accompanied by two men. One is clad in green and bears a carbine—the other of the *cavalleros* is without arms."

"They are?" suggested Alvarez.

"They are Senor Diaz, the Senorita Isabella Diaz, and an American trooper, if my eyes do not deceive me," replied Francisco, returning the glass.

"Did you remark anything striking about them?" pursued Alvarez.

"Capitan, they are widely separated from the troopers, and their capture would not be difficult if so the capitan is inclined," replied Francisco.

"Good!" rejoined Alvarez; "I am so inclined. Command the men to follow, Francisco."

So saying he incased the field-glass, and after a brief glance at the parties in the gorge, commenced the descent. Although the cliff was nearly perpendicular, defying the ascent or descent of the most active and muscular man, it was divided by a wide and deep ravine, which, commencing several hundred yards from the brink of the cliff, extended on an easy plane to the gorge below, affording excellent means for descent.

Down into this ravine dropped the guerrillas, one after another, like sheep, following their leader, who was rapidly riding down to ambush the second party as they would come along, and in a quarter of an hour were in the gorge.

Near the mouth of the ravine a huge rocky promontory jutted out into the gorge, narrowing it by one half, and between the guerrillas and the approaching prey. Leaving the majority of the guerrillas in a dense chaparral which concealed the mouth of the ravine, Alvarez, Francisco and another guerrilla stationed themselves behind the promon-

tory of rock, in wait for the approaching and unconscious band.

Francisco sat firmly in his saddle, facing the center of the gorge. He loosed his lasso from the saddle-horn and slipped the noose.

"Don't fail!" whispered Alvarez. "Remember now, when I give the word dart out and lasso the senorita's horse."

"Francisco was never known to miss a fast," replied the Mexican proudly. "In five minutes the senorita will be the captive of Capitan Alvarez."

Alvarez peered cautiously round the point. The party was close at hand. Unfortunately for her, Isabella was riding in the advance. Her face was downcast, but Alvarez could see that she was grieving, for her cheeks were pale, her eyes swollen as if in consequence of violent weeping, and her bosom heaved tumultuously.

"She mourns for her absent lover!" muttered Alvarez, in sudden anger. "But she will never see him again alive."

Onward came the party, unconscious of the danger that lurked behind the promontory. Behind Isabella rode Diaz, the single trooper being in the rear. All were silent and moody, undoubtedly reflecting on Haywood's sudden disappearance, and faint sighs arose from the maiden's breast which were madness to the waiting guerrilla.

"Speak the word, capitan," whispered Francisco, grasping his lasso firmly as the unsuspecting band drew nearer and nearer.

A few seconds passed, and all was quiet saving the glintings of iron as the hoofs of the coming horses glanced from the rocks with which the gorge was strewn.

"Now!" whispered Alvarez.

Spurring his powerful horse, Francisco darted out into the gorge directly in front of Isabella, whirling his lasso above his head. Alarmed by the sudden clatter of hoofs the senorita looked up. She had scarcely raised her eyes and recognized the features of Francisco, when his lasso in a long spiral line darted through the air, and descending, encircled the neck of her horse.

She shrieked and Diaz looked up, and saw Francisco galloping away, leading his daughter's horse by the neck. In

an instant he comprehended the situation, and galloped to deliver her, followed by the trooper.

As he did so, a sudden flash occurred in the chaparral where the guerrillas were stationed, a loud report of firearms rung out, and Senor Diaz and the trooper, falling from their saddles, lay in their blood upon the ground—dead.

With hoarse yells of gratification the guerrillas, leading their captive who had swooned at her father's death, again ascended the mountain, led by their now triumphant leader, **Marcos Álvarez.**

CHAPTER XI.

VARIOUS MATTERS.

To Haywood, helpless in the lonely cave, the day passed slowly, fraught with terrible meditations. He had been incarcerated several hours after sunrise, when the song-birds were merrily caroling in the forest to the measure of the gentle breezes.

Not a cloud was in the sky. The air was of that soft, genial, yet bracing temperature, which is only possessed by California of all her sister States. Nature seemed to wear an unusual holiday aspect to him, especially as he was facing death. But now a change had taken place. Outside in the glen the birds still warbled, the perfumed zephyr swept through the groves, the sun shone brightly, and the brook babbled as merrily as ever; but instead of bringing him peaceful reveries by its musical tones, the rivulet seemed full of elfish life, and its very chatterings deridings and rejoicing at his approaching doom.

For several hours he lay quite motionless, listening to the brook's weird music, the birds and the rustling foliage; but as the day wore on the gloom and utter silence of the cavern oppressed him, and the sepulchral atmosphere seemed to load his chest like lead. His quiet had been resignation—the submission of a courageous heart to the secret dictates of the Almighty Disposer of events; but the longer he reflected on

his approaching death the less firm became his mind until it began to wander.

Toward the middle of the afternoon (though he knew it not) the sharp pebbles with which the surface of the cave was covered, pained him severely. Endeavoring to discover some means of diverting his dark meditations, he rolled about, trying to find some easier spot for his recumbency. At first he was unable to move, so cramped had he become with his long period of utter quiet; but by degrees, stirring one limb slightly and then another, he gradually recovered the tension of his muscles, and was finally able to roll about, though with the clumsiness of a seal.

He had not much space for his rude exercise, for the cave was small and coffin-like. The roof was only several feet from the floor, and the walls were scarcely two yards apart; but even in this confined space he managed to flounder about, experiencing relief in his motions although bruised in a new place each time.

Finally, after he had become completely exhausted, he discontinued his hard exercise and lay quiet, watching the rocks with which he was barred in. He had often that day remarked that they fitted snugly together; so closely that but few chinks were left to admit light. He wondered how much strength would be required to roll away the rocks—whether one man could do it by a great exertion of force, or whether it would require the combined strength of a dozen strong men. The latter probably, but it mattered not, for he being securely bound could not by any means tumble them away and escape.

Then after this useless conjecture he wondered what the troopers would do, and what course they would be likely to pursue, to rescue him from captivity, if there were any alive to prosecute a search. And Isabella—

Ah! there was the sting. Shooting pains for a moment caused him to cry out—pains created by the mere thought of her. She would grieve of course—she would weep and moan. Her life would become embittered, and her health would droop, as day after day would come and go without his return, or any tidings of him. She would seclude herself from the world.

Stay ! would she ? If faithful to her love she would, and faithful she was. She would weep—

A long time ago, in his early youth, he had sported on the banks of the flashing Hudson. Those were bright, merry years ; but now his venerable father and his sweet mother lay beneath the sod on the banks of the rolling river, dead and long, long ago ; and he now was going to meet them. If in the future—say several decades hence, (he thought fitly staring at the cruel rocks which stood between him and life,) his bones should be chanced upon by some shepherd or wandering hunter, what reflections, if any, would the discovery call up ? Bitter ones ?—scarcely. Merry ones ?—perhaps a coarse witticism, and a rude kick which would scatter the dry bones like chaff before a boisterous north wind.

What space of time would elapse ere his garments would return to the dust whence they came—or would the ground mice nibble away, nibble away until they had made nice cosy nests from them ?

Would they last ten years ? Perhaps. But ten years is a long time. Many a man has become rich, then poor, then broken-hearted, in ten years. Ten years is a long time.

Ten years. If he erred not, his garments were of English material, and were probably fabricated in one of her large, smoky towns, where the weary wheels go round and round, amid the jar and clang of harsh machinery, and the pale faces of homeless working-girls. Girls young, tender and innocent, and girls speeding down the luxurious, broad road to ruin. Girls sweet and fresh, careworn and haggard ; but never a one of them half so precious as Isabella.

Again, the shooting, stinging pains, and again he cries in pain. No longer merry, and warbling happy songs ; but Isabella heart-broken, sad and pallid.

If the dry water-course across the glen, which some day was filled with a cataract, should again cast down its volume of waters upon the rocks, would it dash them from the cave's entrance and set him free—free from their steady, insolent eyes—or would they—would—

Many years ago he read a famous book, which told about a man who was cast away at sea upon a desolate, unknown

island, where he lived for a generation entirely alone. What was that man's name? Was it Senor Diaz, or Marcos Alvarez, or Roland Haywood?

Heavens! could he but elude the horrible monster who was sprawled upon his chest, bearing him down with heavy weight, and whispering insulting words in his ghastly confidence—promises of joyful, rollicking days measureless hereafter, when demons and angels would hobnob in droll fraternity, and the earth and heavens would be one mixed mass of jollity: could he but tear the monster from his breast, and hurl him senseless in the further corner, he would beat and bruise the rocks which kept staring at him so ceaselessly and intently with their quiet, glimmering eyes. Yes, by heaven, he would!

Hark! a shout outside! Another! more! a swelling halloa. Hurrah—God be praised—assistance was nigh. Hurrah!

“Whoo! to-whoo—whoo!”

Listen: was that a human cry? His reeling brain righted itself for a moment, as with purple face, straining eyes, and lips which ran blood from the teeth which gnashed them, he listened for its repetition.

“Whoo—to-whoo—whoo!”

Night had fallen over the earth, and the owl was beginning his discordant concert.

Shrieks—ringing, maniacal shrieks, came from the cavern, the thrilling outcries of departing reason. How they filled the glen with their wild echoes. How the brook leaped and babbled to the tune. How the owl on the crest of the dead tree hooted back his solemn answer to the cries of mental anguish.

“My God! I am going mad. Save me—save me!”

“Hoot—to-whoo—whoo!”

Directly Isabella was captured, she swooned with horror at beholding her father's horse clatter in affright down the gorge, while his venerable rider lay gasping out his life blood upon the ground—a stream of blood which flowed from his throat marking the spot where the messenger of death had taken lodging. Jose Diaz had departed this world; his

daughter was being hurried away into remote mountain fastnesses by her rejected suitor and bitter enemy, Marcos Alvarez.

The guerrilla's task was nearly if not entirely consummated. He had vowed deadly revenge upon three beings. One was now dead—his revenge could extend no further upon him. Another was dying by inches, far away from human assistance; and the lovely Isabella would soon become his bride.

He did not linger for a moment after Jose Diaz and the trooper had been assassinated, and the lieutenant's lasso encircled the neck of Isabella's horse; but shouting for his men to follow, he dashed up the ravine by which he had swooped upon his prey, whirling his insensible captive swiftly along.

In a few moments the rearmost guerrilla had disappeared round a curve in the ravine. Scarcely had the accompanying clatter of hoofs died away, when a single horseman rode out into the center of the gorge from a dense chaparral, and wheeling his horse, drew a dagger and flourished it in the direction of the guerrillas; then he said, in an earnest but stealthy tone, while his dark face gleamed in savage joy:

"Marcos Alvarez, gallop away with your prisoner. Gallop at your horse's best speed. Fly to the end of the world if you will; but henceforth Garcia, the haughty guerrilla's servant, is an American trooper, and in less than an hour his American companions will be on your track. Gallop your best, Senor Capitan, but you can not outstrip vengeance."

Garcia had taken advantage of the confusion attendant on the ambuscade and assault to desert, in order to hasten the fulfillment of his vengeful vows. He was well aware that if Isabella should be rescued by the Americans, her loss would be a severe blow to Alvarez, and in the strife over her Garcia would have an excellent opportunity for wreaking his vengeance upon the guerrilla; and in order to execute these two designs he had deserted.

Wheeling his mustang, he dashed recklessly up the rocky gorge, galloping to overtake the distant troopers, who, unconscious of the bloody deeds behind them, were still slowly traversing the gorge.

"Fly!" he cried to his sturdy mustang, snapping his fingers with ferocious joy. "Run like the wind, for we are on the direct yet sinuous path of vengeance."

Tossing his plucky head, the mustang, darting recklessly over shingle, brush and arroyo—winding swiftly in and out among chaparral, brake and grove—flew on to overtake the receding troopers, two miles away.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW RECRUIT.

IN advance of the spurring half-breed, and slowly picking their way amid the fragments of rock, gnarled trees and dense thickets with which the gorge was infested, the troopers wended their weary way. Their object was to discover their missing captain, if possible, and to extricate him should he be in a dangerous position; but having no idea of the course taken by the guerrillas in their flight, they were entirely blind as to what direction to pursue, and were merely traversing the mountains hoping to fall in with the guerrillas, and then track them to their lair.

The troopers were sorrowful. Haywood was loved by the truest among them. He had ever been a kind, considerate master, and a generous and magnanimous victor; and these alone, without his other good traits, and the brilliant courage which they profoundly admired, had given him an enviable position in their respect and affections.

Ois, as the second in command, was now their leader, and he resolved to let no opportunity slip by which he could turn to advantage in regaining his captain, and at the same time wreak heavy vengeance upon the guerrillas; and it was in meditation of the best course to pursue that he said, as they passed slowly along:

"I am afraid, Moore, that it will be some time before we see the captain again, or for that matter the greasers, curse their black faces and blacker hearts!"

"Why so?" asked Moore.

"Because the greaser captain has lost a few men by us, lately, and though not a coward, is still a Mexican, and if I'm not wrong will go to other parts where he can find easier prey than Haywood's greens have proved."

"I shouldn't wonder if he had already," responded Moore, "and taken the captain with him to boot."

"Now that is what alarms me," said Otis, anxiously; "the captain and the greaser are not on very good terms—"

"I should say not when Alvarcz stole into San Rafael at night to murder him," interrupted a trooper.

"And then tried to burn him alive," pursued Moore. "No, they ain't on very loving terms, that's a fact. What were you saying, lieutenant?"

"I was saying that, seeing as he and the captain are deadly enemies, now the guerrilla has got him under his thumb he will be apt to use him mighty rough, to pay for being cut out in love."

"How? Is there a lady in the case, then?" inquired Moore, in surprise.

"Do you ask that question?" demanded Otis, in some contempt. "Have you seen them billing and cooing together for the last month, and don't know that they are engaged?"

"Who engaged?" asked Moore, fretfully.

"Why, the captain and the Senorita Isabelia, to be sure."

"That's news to me," declared Moore.

"But it is not to me, by a long chalk. It has been going on under our very eyes for this long time. I can see through a mill-stone when there's a hole in it."

"And did the captain cut the greaser out?" asked a trooper.

"Indeed he did!" replied Otis, with a hearty laugh of pride, "as clean as a whistle. I tell you, the captain can do other things as well as fight, but he did that little maneuver too well, I'm dubious. For it has made Alvarcz crazy with disappointment and jealousy, and there is not a bigger fiend on earth than a jealous Mexican. I have done a good deal of hard fighting in my day but I am afraid of one and only one thing on earth, and that is a jealous Mexican.

I've wrestled with cinnamon bears, which are as much worse than grizzlies as centipedes or vipers are than angle-worms. Those fellows at the East—those editors in New York who write books full of enormous yarns—always in their stories set up the grizzly as the king of American brutes. Now, any man that has ever been across the Sierra Nevadas knows better. A grizzly can't climb a tree—a cinnamon can. A grizzly can't hug like—”

“What were you saying, lieutenant, about jealous Mexicans?” interrupted Moore, foreseeing a dry and lengthy dissertation on Eastern ignorance regarding the cinnamon bear.

“I was saying,” replied Otis, diverted from his subject. “I was saying, that the arch-fiend of the world is a Mexican when he is jealous. Spanish and Indian blood mixed, make the Mexican, who is a half-breed. Spanish are hot and fiery, Indians are revengeful and implacable; and the two make a mighty mean man.”

“But the native Californians, before American trickery and avarice stole into their hearts, were as hospitable, kind and generous people as ever I want to see;” said a retiring man, hitherto a silent listener to the conversation. Otis turned upon him sharply.

“Don't say American avarice and trickery,” he said, caustically, “for that is unjust. An influx of strangers always caused suspicion and reserve on the part of natives, and these two parents breed evil offspring like rabbits in a warren.”

“But—”

Whatever retort the trooper was about to make was not uttered, for a distinct shout was heard behind them, and entirely dropping the desultory and not very perspicuous argument, the troopers reined in their horses, and wheeling, looked back upon their path.

A single horseman, perhaps half a mile distant, was approaching at as swift pace as could be maintained through the rough sinuosities of the gorge. The troopers, to ascertain his nationality, needed not the broad, flapping *sombrero*, the scarlet sash which flaunted from his waist, nor the massive stirrups visible even at that distance; the ease and grace of his equitation, causing the rider to appear part of

his steed, could only be the attainment of a Mexican or Spaniard, and nearly all of the troopers uttered the same ejaculation.

“A greaser!”

In a few moments the half-breed Garcia reined in his mustang in the midst of the waiting troopers. Although he was armed *cap-a-pie*, and his swarthy visage gleamed with passion, and his demonstrative gestures, though warlike, did not evince any hostility, the troopers received him in quiet attention.

Without waiting for any greeting or questions, he broke forth impulsively in the Spanish tongue, his keen gaze flitting from one trooper to another so rapidly that it seemed not to tarry for a second on any individual, but which closely scanned every object on which it rested.

“Senors,” he cried, with a gesture over his shoulder, “why do you desert your charge? They are in peril. The Senor Diaz and your comrade are dead.”

“Dead!” echoed the troopers, astounded at the revelation. Dead!”

The half-breed with Mexican volubility continued, with a variety of constant abrupt gestures.

“I was a guerrilla, I am now, if it pleases you, an American trooper. Not an hour ago I was one of Marcos Alvarez’ band, and in that capacity, was one of a party who shot Senor Diaz and your brother trooper dead from their saddles, and carried the beautiful senorita away into miserable captivity.”

Out flashed the knives of the troopers, as with faces pale with anger and new-born grief, they spurred toward him. But Garcia, without making any attempt to evade their attack, simply raised his hand to request forbearance, and this slight but potent act, coupled with the strange gleam which passed over his face, stayed their hands, as they perceived he had a purpose in view.

“If you kill me,” he said, quietly, “all is lost. Your leader is probably dying if not dead already. The Senorita Isabella of whom you set store, is being hastened away to a place which only I can guide you to. Perhaps I can save your capitan’s life. I know I can guide you to the rescue

of the senorita and the complete capture of the guerrillas. Now kill me."

For a moment all was silence. The troopers, astounded at Garcia's revelations, sat with their hands still clasping their knives, looking sternly upon Garcia who returned their lowering glances with one of sullen dissatisfaction. At length Otis broke the silence.

"You have something to divulge, I see--matters of importance to us. Tell your story, Mexican, and be quick about it."

Thus peremptorily requested, Garcia at once entered upon a concise narrative interspersed with countless gestures, shrugs of the shoulders and rapid scowls, in the peculiar Mexican manner. He detailed the circumstances of Haywood's capture, his brutal reception, the implacability of Alvarez and Haywood's fate, to him alone of the guerrilla band a mystery. Then he related the ambush, the sudden attack, the death of Diaz and the trooper; and concluded with a vivid and exaggerated account of Isabella's capture.

Throughout the entire narrative he endeavored with all the force of his imagination and voluble, eloquent speech, to color highly each event, dwelling particularly upon Alvarez' brutal treatment of Haywood; and to such an extreme did he delineate his story, that he succeeded even beyond his expectations and quite equal to his desires in working the troopers' emotions to a high pitch.

Otis bent a prolonged and anxious gaze back into the gorge, half hoping to see his companions, so heedlessly and fatally left behind, appear. But they did not, and with a violent denunciation of his criminal carelessness he turned to Garcia.

"What proof have we that your story is true?" he demanded, abruptly.

"Back in the canon," said the half-breed with a gesture of grave and vivid emphasis, "are the lifeless bodies of Senor Diaz and the American soldier. I will guide you thither, so you can see for yourself."

"And decoy us into an ambuscade," said Otis, dryly. "It is a very neat artifice, Mexican."

Garcia burst out violently, impatient to be on the track of his hated enemy.

"You may bind me before any one of your men and cover me with your carbines; and if I prove false you can instantly shoot me. Do you think I would make such a proposition if I intended to play you false?"

Notwithstanding the half-breed's readiness to put himself completely in the troopers' power, Otis still felt suspicious, not favorably impressed with the volunteer's countenance, and demanded:

"Why do you desert your band, Mexican, and profess such a violent desire to betray them? That looks wrong. If false to one, you will be false to another."

"American," replied the half-breed, smiting his breast fiercely, while his dark eye blazed with awakened ferocity, "I was on guard, I was faint from lack of food, and by severe, incessant labor, exhausted, I ventured to leave my post in order to request Marcos Alvarez to place a fresh man in my stead, lest I should faint with exhaustion. For this, American—for this—Alvarez with a club struck me to the ground, nearly tearing my eye out. See!"

With hand trembling in passion he pointed to the lacerated eye, which affected by his strong emotion began to bleed sullenly. The other orb blazed as he proceeded.

"I have been insulted, degraded, outraged. For this I will have revenge. I would see Marcos Alvarez die a dog's death before the rising of another sun. I would see every desire he cherishes thwarted overthrown—every thing on which his affections cling, blasted; and in order to achieve this, I now volunteer to lead you against him."

Otis' suspicions faded as he marked Garcia's manner. There was no mistaking the half-breed's overwhelming desire to be revenged on Alvarez, for his blazing eyes and distorted countenance spoke volumes of hate and earnestness. Calming himself somewhat, the half breed continued:

"Let us make haste, for time is precious. Do not delay a moment but follow me. We must first find your leader, whether dead or alive. Then we will fall upon Marcos Alvarez, rescue the senorita, and then my work is done. Come—make haste."

Without further delay the troopers proceeded to comply with the urgent request. Garcia's lasso was taken from his

saddle, and with it his mustang was tied to Otis' horse. Then the half-breed was secured to his saddle with deerskin thongs, and thus prevented from escaping, even should he desire to, and covered by several ominous carbines, he led the way down the gorge to the rescue.

In a few moments the troopers were gazing sorrowfully down on the lifeless faces of Diaz and his escort, now in their eternal sleep. Not a word was spoken, but secret vows of revenge filled each sturdy heart, as urged by the impatient half-breed they reluctantly left the quiet bodies for the present, and galloped up the ravine whose course Marcos Alvarez had followed in his flight.

Swiftly yet stealthily pursuing their gloomy way, an hour's hard riding found them on the border of the glen, where, unknown to them, lay the motionless form of a man imprisoned in a cave.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LIBERATION.

THE troopers paused on the border of the glade, and sat in their saddles quietly staring around on the stern and frowning though lovely landscape. The glen was silent, and saving their presence, deserted. The song-birds, which, attracted by the luxuriant foliage and lucid waters of the rivulet, usually wakened the adjacent echoes with their jovial trills and quavers, had disappeared, and their absence in removing a pleasant attribute to the glen, rendered it of sepulchral melancholy. The gloom was augmented by a solitary owl which sat on the topmost bough of a blasted oak moodily pluming himself, and at intervals uttering a discordant asthmatical croak, as if congratulating himself upon the universal silence which reigned over glen and grove.

Near the opposite border of the glen were the charred remains of the guerrillas' camp-fire. Several bones were scattered about, the remnants of the Mexicans' breakfast. Evidently wolves had recently visited the glen, for the bones

were stripped of the scanty flesh which had adhered in spite of the guerrillas' teeth only to be torn off by the sharper ones of the wild and ferocious animals, and the bones were now as white and glistening as if they had for a year been exposed to the elements.

Garcia noticed the evidences of the wolves' visitation, and after pursuing a chain of raticcination thereupon, a vague glimmer of disappointment crossed his face. The demeanor of the ex-guerrilla had undergone a marked change. His Mexican volubility and savage vivacity had given place to steady, imperturbable composure, which suited him better as best belonging to his sullen, untamed disposition, and revealing in a certain manner his undisguised nature. The Indian blood which predominated in his veins had asserted dominion over the lesser Spanish fluid; and therefore, the sullen composure of the half-breed was the implacability of the Indian upon the track of revenge.

"El capitan is not here," he said, in a low tone, addressing whomsoever might deign to listen, while his ever-roving eye kept flitting about the glen.

"I had expected to find him at the end of a lasso, suspended to a tree by the neck; but as you can see, I am disappointed, and agreeably."

A low murmur of approval and gratification rose from the troopers.

"El capitan is not visible," resumed Garcia, after a brief pause; "but he can not be far away. He is, I have no doubt, still alive."

"How do you know—what reason have you for so thinking?" inquired Otis, joyfully.

"If he had been executed by Marcos Alvarez," continued the half-breed, with that indescribable air which conveys conviction and a sense of truth to the listener, "the vultures, which swarm in these mountains, would be wheeling in the sky, attracted hither by the smell of dead flesh, which they perceive at a long distance, even an hour after the death of their prey, when the breath has scarcely departed from the body. No vultures are wheeling aloft, as we can plainly see. I know the capitan was left here in this very glen. If he is dead, vultures would be at hand. There are none. Hence,

he is here and alive, though why Alvarez should have spared his life is a mystery to Garcia."

A murmur of admiration at the half-breed's rude logic rounded the semicircle of troopers.

"Loose my bonds," requested Garcia, "and when I am at liberty, I will find el capitan, if he is in the vicinity."

Otis shook his head in grave negative.

"Garcia," he said, quietly, "you having guided us to this lonely spot in these dismal mountains, now want to be loosed. What proof have we that your former comrades are not lurking around somewhere, ready to pounce upon us at your preconcerted signal?"

"The American doubts me!" said Garcia, with anger. "But I must have the use of my limbs or I can not continue the search. Were I not dying to punish Alvarez—were I merely doing you a favor or acting in a mercenary capacity, I would refuse to take another step, and let your suspicious men, to whom the book of nature is a riddle, a mystery, act on your own inexperienced judgment. Now, senors, unbind me, and we will continue; refuse, and Garcia throws up all promises."

Garcia meant what he said, and the troopers were forced to comply with his demand. His bonds were accordingly relaxed, and Garcia leisurely dismounted, though under the black muzzles of several carbines. When he had several times stretched himself, like an animal, to regain the elasticity of his limbs, he calmly took his lasso from his mustang's neck and Otis' saddle-horn, and passing the noose over his head, drew it rather tightly around his neck, then gave the other end of the *riata* to Otis.

"The American doubts Garcia," he said, with native lofty pride, and a glance of injured honor, strangely contrasting with his usual sullen savageness. "Now, Senor Americano," he resumed, with a significant touch of the lasso, "you have me in your power. At the least intimation of treachery on my part, a quick and strong jerk of the lasso will break my neck. Does the voluntary placing of myself in a position of extreme peril, appear as if I meditated treachery, brave and trusting American?"

"I will doubt you no longer!" said Otis, slightly coloring

with shame at his pertinacious suspicions. "Lead on, Garcia!"

But, nevertheless, he retained his hold upon the lasso.

"Our search will be brief," said Garcia, composed again, having apparently forgotten his choler. "We have little further to go to find el capitan."

"How so?" cried the troopers, joyfully, with one accord.

Garcia pointed to the hill which contained the cavern.

"Do you see a dozen spots near the hill and close to the brook, which are bare of herbage, having a moist appearance?"

"Yes. Rocks have lately rested there," replied Otis, gazing at the place mentioned.

"The American speaks truly. Rocks have been dislodged from their resting-places, and that within three days. Now look a trifle to the left of the bare spots, and you will see the same rocks again, but rolled into other places. A cave is there, senor, I am certain. The rocks have been rolled to the cave recently, blocking completely its entrance, as you can plainly see. In that cave, senor, is el capitan. He was probably left to die a lingering death by starvation, but whether he is dead or alive, I, of course, am unable to say."

"You know every thing, Mexican. You are very wise. You are extraordinary. You are preternatural. You will favor me by showing me the book whence you obtained your learning."

"I learn from the book of nature!" thundered Garcia, with a withering glance of contempt upon the sarcastic speaker, who was none other than the retiring, cynical trooper before mentioned in these pages. "American, I have one profession, and only one; and in that profession I am an adept, an expert. I profess but one calling—that of a tracker, scout and guide. You are a soldier, and by using lengthy words wish to appear wise. Americano, I do not vaunt, but in my humble calling I am good, as you will see; and if el capitan is not in yonder cavern, my horse, my saddle, my ninety dollars, my weapons—all are yours."

After the delivery of his caustic speech, Garcia strode angrily toward the cave, followed by all of the troopers, the sarcastic individual pressing eagerly forward to roll the rocks away from the cave, and proving the half-breed's assertion false, claim the proffered forfeit. But before they had traversed half of the distance, they heard a sound which caused them all to draw rein and stare at one another in surprise.

The sound was a groan, hollow and muffled, as if coming from the bowels of the earth, proceeding evidently from the cavern.

Garcia cast a contemptuous glance at the ironical trooper, and said, quietly :

" Marcos Alvarez is a clever fiend. He knows the sweets of revenge and the bitterness of a lonely, lingering death. He has confined el capitan in yonder cave to starve. There you will find el capitan."

As another deep groan, hollower and more sepulchral than the first, echoed from the mysterious cavern, the troopers sprung from their horses and ran toward the place. Stimulated by the idea that their beloved captain was suffering in the grave like place, the troopers went to work with their whole strength, and being powerful men, they soon rolled the rocks away from the entrance, hastened several times by the repetition of the deep and unearthly groans, which were powerful incentives to their labor.

Soon the last ponderous rock was with difficulty torn from its place, and the gaping, somber cave was open.

Several troopers immediately rushed in. By the dim light they perceived a form, motionless and recumbent on the floor.

Grasping it, they drew it rapidly out into the fresh air and beautiful sunlight, and cheer after cheer pealed through the glen, awaking the distant echoes which resounded the shouts merrily. Pale and haggard, with gashed, bloody face and torn lips—with a world of grief, pain and care upon his noble countenance, Haywood lay before them, insensible, but alive, thank God ! and saved.

" El capitan is found, alive ;" said Garcia, calmly. Then he added, turning to the sarcastic trooper ; " is Garcia a fool now, senor ?"

His speech was unheeded by any. He was moreover at liberty to escape if he chose, for Otis had relinquished his grasp upon the lasso as Haywood was drawn into the open air, and had darted to greet his rescued leader. But Haywood made no reply to the fervent expressions of joy and thanksgiving that the faithful fellow poured out in a torrent, while the remainder of the troopers laughed, sung and cheered in demonstrative and boisterous delight. He was in a species of trance, brought on by terrible meditation upon his doom, now happily averted. His lips, bloody and lacerated, showed the marks of his teeth which had gnashed them in horror when reason had terrified him by threatening to depart. His whole countenance revealed the traces of his terrible mental struggle, and the bloody gash on his cheek related vividly the brutality of Alvarez toward his intended victim. At this last sign of suffering, the troopers mingled their imprecations upon the guerrilla chief, while Garcia quietly fetched water from the brook in his huge hat, and dashed it upon Haywood's pale face.

In this he was assisted by the men. Haywood was gently borne to the rivulet, and placing him upon the green shelving bank they assiduously bathed his face, chafed his hands and feet, and applied other simple means for his resuscitation. For a long time their earnest efforts were unrewarded by any evidences of returning animation. The terrible ordeal through which Haywood had passed, and which would have forever shattered a weaker brain and frailer constitution, had, while resulting in no permanent injury, temporarily weakened both mind and body; and in such an exhausted condition it was a long time before he returned to life.

Haywood, two hours after his liberation, staggered to his feet and stared vacantly about him, and muttered several incoherent sentences; his mind was yet wandering. His eyes were unsteady, with little or no expression beside a sort of stupid and lazy wonder at his strange situation.

"Where are Isabella and Senor Diaz?" he suddenly demanded of Otis. The latter in his simplicity was about to relate the fallen fortunes of the Spanish family, when the shrewd half-breed, aware of Haywood's affection for the Spanish senorita and her dead parent, foreseeing the shock

of the startling news would cause a relapse in his exhausted condition, said :

" Senor capitan, they are even now awaiting your gracious presence."

" Where are they—who are you?" demanded Haywood, turning upon the half-breed with an unsteady glance.

" Senor capitan, I am a new trooper—a guide; and when you are sufficiently recovered, I will lead you to the senorita and her noble parent."

" Where are they?" And Haywood's wandering, unsteady gaze rested for a moment upon Garcia.

" They are in Monterey," said Otis, with a shrewdness unusual with him.

" In Monterey?" echoed Haywood, in languid surprise.

" Yes, captain. You have been confined a week or more. During that time we escorted them to Monterey, not knowing where you were, or that you had been captured. They are perfectly safe. God forgive the lie!" he added, superfluously, to himself.

" I want to go to Monterey!" said Haywood, uneasily. " I want to see Isabella and Diaz."

" All in good time, senor capitan," said Garcia, soothingly. " You are too weak to journey now. Soon you will be quite recovered; and then we will go to Monterey."

" But I want to go now!" persisted Haywood, with the petulance of a spoiled child opposed in some trivial desire.

" But, senor—"

" Silence!" roared Haywood, with the only energy he had yet shown. " I am commander of my own troop. I say I want to go to Monterey."

" Hush!" and Garcia lifted his hand warningly, and in an attitude of intense listening, peered keenly down the glen.

" The voice of Alvarez—the guerrillas! they come," said Garcia, sharply. " Get the horses into the chaparral—quick!"

As he spoke he seized Haywood's arm, and assisted by Otis, hurried him into a dense chaparral which bordered one side of the glen, while the troopers hastily led the horses into the same convenient shelter, and in a short time the

glen was deserted, and only the distant but nearing voices and hoof-strokes, indicated the slow and leisurely approach of a body of horsemen, which, by the recognition of the voices, Garcia had announced as the guerrillas.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RIVALS' MEETING.

GARCIA'S assertion was correct for the approaching horsemen were the guerrillas or rather a part of them, this band being a squad in attendance upon Marcos Alvarez. For the guerrilla chief, now that he had given the reins to his evil passions, hesitated at no deed of turpitude, and his brain, fertile in peace, doubly so in hostility, had conceived a brilliant plan by which he could torment to a still greater degree the last suffering hours of his victim, Haywood.

Leaving (for what reason was never known) the majority of his followers at his temporary encampment, he was now conveying Isabella to the cavern in the glen, there to torment his unfortunate victim by the sight of her, forever lost to him and doomed to a miserable existence as the unwilling bride of Marcos Alvarez. The conception was wholly of the brain and heart from which it emanated. None but a thorough-paced scoundrel would have thought of such superlative delight, such exquisite revenge; but in accordance with the will of the Almighty Disposer, his villainous plans were to be frustrated and that right early.

As he drew near his destination, his face, corrugated with the seams of profligacy, gleamed with savage joy as he pictured to himself the agony of his rival at beholding his betrothed the unwilling and miserable bride of him above all others. Ever and anon his wild glance would rest for a moment on Isabella, gloating over her misery, and enjoying his triumph. At times her eyes would chance to meet his; and they bent such a grief-stricken, accusing glance upon him, that he fain withdrew his gaze and bent it sullenly in other directions.

The unfortunate senorita was well nigh distracted. She had seen her father, whom she had loved almost to idolatry, cruelly, villainously assassinated before her very eyes. This alone was sufficient to rack her heart; and in unison with other sorrows, though less severe, rendered her almost frantic. Haywood, whom she devotedly loved with all the strength of her affectionate disposition, had disappeared, she knew not whither, but she suspected that Alvarez was the cause of his evanishment. If he was in the Mexican's power she abandoned all hopes of ever seeing him again. Her own situation too, though as yet not dangerous, was extremely precarious as regarded the future. She well knew Alvarez' depravity and implacability, and fearing the worst, trembled.

She was wholly in the dark as to her destination, but the vivid gratification expressed in the Mexican's swarthy face proved that he anticipated a speedy triumph of some description. Alarmed at his savage joy she had several times essayed to escape, and once had dashed away from the band at a reckless gallop; but Francisco's unerring lasso speedily terminated her flight, and to prevent her escaping, Alvarez had formed a circle of guerrillas around her, vigilantly watching her slightest motions.

As the guerrillas emerged from the thickets and halted on the border of the glen, Alvarez at once cast his gaze toward the cavern, that being the point on which all his anticipations were centered. An oath escaped him as he saw that the rocks which had confined Haywood had been rolled away.

He was for a moment rendered inert and paralyzed by astonishment. Those huge and ponderous stones—who could have rolled them away? Not Haywood, surely, for the combined strength of a dozen men had been required to place them, and it would take half that number to remove them. But the conjecture was useless. No matter who did it, the rocks had been displaced, and without the least doubt his prisoner, whom he had reckoned absolutely doomed, had escaped.

With a ringing cry of actual pain, he sprung from his horse and rushed into the cave although he had no expectations of finding Haywood. Nor was he disappointed in that sense; but he yelled oaths, ejaculations and curses at finding

the place deserted, that even the guerrillas, men depraved and hardened, habituated to the display of brutal passions from their childhood, shuddered, and Isabella trembled in terror.

Alvarez staggered from the cavern and reeling across the brook stood swaying to and fro, while to the guerrillas his eyes seemed to flash actual fire. He bent his scowling gaze around the glen as if half expecting to perceive his escaped victim; and as his eyes fell upon Isabella his features became yet more distorted, his lips trembled convulsively, and he raised his shaking hand with a threatening gesture—a gesture accompanied by a glance that froze the blood in her veins.

Alvarez' rage and discomfiture were witnessed by others besides his frightened captive and awed followers. Snugly ensconced in the chaparral in which they had taken shelter, the troopers, unseen by the guerrillas, surveyed the chief's passion and wild gestures with triumphant delight, but none more so than Garcia. The half-breed felt the blood grow hot in his veins with savage joy as he watched his frantic enemy. Several times he raised his carbine to terminate the Mexican's career; but us often lowered it, waiting for the time to come when he could fulfill his vow, and mix his own blood which smeared his dagger, with that of Alvarez' heart.

There was another hidden person who rejoiced at Alvarez' display of rage and disappointment. Haywood had suddenly and completely recovered his senses at beholding the faces of the two who were his most precious friend and bitterest enemy. He saw that Isabella was a captive and in no agreeable or endurable bondage, as her haggard features testified, and he burned to encounter once again his wicked enemy, and at the saber point avenge the death of Diaz, of which event Otis had just informed him.

Exasperated and wrought up to a high pitch of anger at his imprisonment which had nearly proved so fatal, he could not resist a loud cry of defiance and triumph. Raising his weakened voice by a violent effort to its usual clear and ringing tone, he shouted:

“Tear and rend, Marcos Alvarez—tear and rend. I Hay-

wood, your intended victim, have escaped, and now you dastardly scoundrel, I defy you."

He had forgotten his usual prudence in giving loud utterance to his emotions, by the act betraying the occupancy of the chaparral to the guerrillas. Otis had collected the troopers in a compact body in order to emerge suddenly upon the guerrillas, who were about their equal in number, and by an unexpected and sharp onslaught put the Mexicans to flight and rescue Isabella. But his plan, which if undertaken, would probably have been attended with success, was frustrated by Haywood's unlooked for and imprudent defiance.

At the voice, well known and hated, Alvarez discontinued his frantic ebullitions of rage, and pausing with his hand still uplifted, snuffed the air, glaring into the chaparral with the angry, attentive gaze of a startled tiger. For a moment he remained irresolute as if suspecting that Haywood was not alone, and evidently discussing the safety of a sudden charge into the thickets; then he ran to his horse, vaulted into the saddle, and shouted:

"Follow me, men—into the chaparral!"

Rage had overcome his judgment. Burning to meet Haywood, he was riding in the face of all prudence and discretion into a dense chaparral wherein might be lying a score of hidden foes, against whom an attack was madness.

At his command, the Mexicans put spurs to their horses and galloped across the rocky glen toward the chaparral. Alvarez whirling his saber over his head, was already forcing his unwilling horse into the bushes.

They were suffered to enter without molestation. A careful volley might have routed them, then and there, and slain half of their number; but being in close order with Isabella in the center, the troopers durst not discharge their carbines through fear of injuring the senorita, and reluctantly withheld their fire.

The utter silence which reigned over the chaparral led the guerrillas to believe that Haywood was alone and unsupported; and counting on a speedy recapture they urged their horses into the copse yelling vociferously. In so doing they became scattered. Now was the troopers' opportunity; and

each one singling his man, they poured in their reserved volley.

Three guerrillas dropped silently from their horses, dead; while another flung his arms wildly above his head, with a stream of blood issuing from his swarthy neck, then reeled from his saddle, mortally wounded.

Their companions halted, dismayed at the unexpected and fatal volley which proved that a body of soldiers was in the chaparral. For a minute they were inclined to retreat; but, enraged at the loss of their comrades, they continued their slow and toilsome advance.

Francisco and a stalwart guerrilla halted on the border of the chaparral, and placing themselves before Isabella, prepared to resist any attempt which might be made to rescue their captive. They had scarcely done so when two troopers burst from the bushes, and with a cheer advanced to the rescue.

They were Otis and Moore. The latter as soon as he got clear of the bushes, halted, and taking a deliberate aim, fired his carbine.

Francisco dropped the lasso by which he retained possession of Isabella's pony, and quietly fell from his saddle—dead.

His surviving companion, seeing himself opposed by two determined men, and furthermore beholding his comrades in full retreat across the glen, wheeled his horse and snatching the lasso, galloped away with Isabella.

But he did not gallop far. As he urged his horse down the glen behind the several remaining guerrillas, Otis dropped on his knee, raised his carbine to his shoulder, and holding the sights for a moment on the flying Mexican, fired.

Shot through and through his broad body, the guerrilla reeled, swayed, caught at his saddle-horn in a vain endeavor to sustain himself, then rolled dead to the ground, with the hot blood gushing from his mouth and nostrils. The two troopers rushed forward, and grasping Isabella's plunging, terrified horse, helped her to dismount, while the guerrillas in full retreat dashed madly down the mountain-side.

"She's saved, hurrah!" cried Otis. "Sen-yore-eeta, I'm your overjoyed yours to command;" and he tipped his green hat gallantly.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FINAL DUEL.

UPON the rout of the guerrillas the troopers led their horses from the chaparral, and mounting, clattered down the glen in hot pursuit. The Mexicans were reduced in numbers from ten to three; and this trio was dashing down the ravine, each flying guerrilla making the best of his way toward their encampment, several miles distant. The troopers, with the exception of Otis, who closely guarded Isabella, and Haywood who had remained perdu, followed in hot pursuit.

Gradually the sharp glintings of the horses' hoofs on the pebbles and bowlders grew less as they became more distant, and soon only faint and desultory shouts, and the reverberation of a carbine's report through the adjacent glens, indicated that the pursuit was maintained with undiminished ardor.

Of all the guerrillas one only scorned to retreat: Marcos Alvarez. He had beheld his men rapidly thinned by the brisk and accurate fire of the troopers. He had seen them battle desperately, until, reduced two-thirds, they fled panic-stricken. He had observed the rescue of Isabella and the death of Francisco, than whom he would have rather lost any three men, and the utter rout and frightened flight of his guerrillas. He knew that he was entirely unaided, and therefore stood in imminent danger; but the signal defeat of the flower of his band, the loss to him of Isabella, the waxing triumph of his liberated victim, maddened him, and in proportion as his fortunes waned, he turned to revenge himself upon Haywood.

Life, if he should be foiled in his final revenge, had no charm for him. He prayed for a short period only of life—just sufficient in which to slay his foeman. Then if it was so ordained, he would die by the troopers' hands, for

that fate he expected if he succeeded in murdering Haywood.

Standing upon the back of his powerful horse, he had been enabled to mark the progress of the fight over the top of the chaparral. Now, from the same elevated perch, he bestowed a wary glance about him before penetrating further into the chaparral in search of Haywood.

To him there were only two persons visible on the abandoned battle-ground. In the glen, Isabella was resting on a boulder, while Otis, blushing like a school-girl, strutted and bristled about her with mighty salams at some undistinguishable remarks which the senorita was making; probably profuse thanks and fervent expressions of gratitude for her rescue. Alvarez anticipated no molestation from Otis—the latter buzzed and hummed about the beautiful girl like the hackneyed moth and ancient candle.

“Shout, and brag, and bristle, you!” he muttered, scowling at Otis. “To save your life you can’t tear yourself away from those eyes. But it is good. The longer you stay away from your leader, the better it is for me.”

With this, he gently spurred his horse. The animal in response breasted the dense bushes, and bending his head, slowly forced his way further into the chaparral. Meanwhile the Mexican’s eyes constantly flitted to and fro in keen watchfulness. Now they were directed down the ravine whence came the faint sounds of the pursuit; now behind him, on Isabella and Otis in the glen; again on the alert for hidden enemies: but ever returning to the chaparral in front, where was his yet unseen foe.

Just before him grew a bushy live-oak, the only tree throughout the extensive chaparral. Under this tree with saber to shoulder and stern eyes fixed on Alvarez, stood Haywood, awaiting the arrival of his enemy.

As the Mexican perceived the trooper captain, a gleam of fierce joy lent for the moment a richer color to his dark face. The pupils of his eyes dilated, his teeth revealed themselves in a wicked smile, and he slightly flourished his heavy saber as his horse slowly worked his way through the chaparral toward the oak tree where waited Haywood.

In a few moments Alvarez was close upon his enemy.

He had meditated riding him down, but a large bush intervened between him and Haywood, and prevented the attack. But he leaned over his horse's head, and swinging his saber, brought it down with great force toward Haywood. But the latter, though in an exhausted condition, still retained in his excitement much of his usual agility and address; and as the heavy saber flashed downward he interposed his weapon, parrying the blow, at the same instant springing back out of the guerrilla's reach.

"Coward!" hissed Alvarez, doubly enraged at the failure of his heavy blow; "stand to your fight like a man, and don't run like a whipped hound."

Haywood's pale face became whiter and his eyes glittered, as he quietly said:

"Dismount—you will then have a better chance. You can not fight fettered by bushes. Come into this open space and meet me, scoundrel. We have met for the last time. No one is nigh to interrupt us, and one or the other of us must fall."

"One or the other of us must fall," repeated the guerrilla, with ominous emphasis, as he slowly dismounted, and wheeling his saber over his head, advanced to meet his antagonist.

Each combatant fastened his earnest gaze upon his adversary. Each felt that they were met in their final combat, and one must fall, perhaps both.

Without any preliminary maneuvering, the combat was commenced. Fast and furious flashed the saber of the Mexican, who pressed Haywood with all his collected strength and skill. From the beginning, the American acted entirely on the defensive, for he was too weak to hazard his frail strength against that of his fresh and furious foe. He exerted his whole skill and power in warding off Alvarez' furious blows, and at first fought energetically; but soon began to sink. His imprisonment had weakened every part of his system, and in proportion as the Mexican's blows became faster and heavier, his defense became weaker.

In a few moments his vigorous defense commenced to diminish rapidly. He panted for breath; a mist floated before his eyes, and his guard became mechanical; he was swiftly sinking.

Alvarez, with savage joy, beheld Haywood reel and gasp for breath. As Will-o'-the-Wisp, swooning with exhaustion, reeled back and leaned, deathly pale, against the tree, with his saber hanging passively by his side, thereby laying him open to death, Alvarez, with a wild cry of triumph, shortened his saber and sprung forward to deal the death blow.

But he was stopped half-way. From an adjacent thicket darted a slender, swarthy man, flourishing a dagger, whose glittering blade was smeared with dried blood.

Squatting, he condensed himself into a ball; then, with the elasticity of India-rubber, he darted upon Alvarez, bearing him to the earth as he was on the eve of burying his thirsty saber in the heart of his adversary, who now lay swooning upon the ground.

Alvarez, hurled violently to the earth, looked up and met the gleaming eyes of Garcia peering down into his, alive and sparkling with rage and triumph. The half-breed's hands were closely compressing the guerrilla's throat; and as under the tremendous pressure Alvarez' face became distorted and darker, as his eyes rolled in agony and his swollen tongue protruded from his bloodless lips, Garcia spoke, loosing his striking hand.

"On this dagger," he said, in a voice hoarse with passion, is blood—my blood—shed by you from this lacerated eye, which is now forever sightless. I have sworn that this blood which you shed shall mingle with the black blood of your heart. See the dagger—see the blood? Do you?"

He held the dagger close before Alvarez' eyes, now rolling in terror and agony. Then he raised it aloft.

"Marcos Alvarez, you are a dead man, and Garcia is revenged."

As he spoke, down went the bloody dagger, once, twice, thrice into the guerrilla's breast, while Garcia laughed in maniacal triumph, and Alvarez gasped in his death-throes; and as Isabella rushed upon the scene, and with a wild cry flung herself upon her senseless lover, the half-breed rose, and with a parting ferocious glance at his dead enemy, fled into the thickets and was never seen or heard of again.

Space forbids us to further prolong this narrative. Wo

must leave undescanted upon the utter extermination of the guerrilla band by the troopers ; Senor Diaz' sad burial, and the sincere grief with which his dust was returned to its birth-place ; the termination of the war soon after, and the return of balmy peace ; the marriage, a year later, of Haywood and Isabella, and their future cloudless lives ; and leaving the gentle reader to delineate these occurrences into a mental story of his own, we close the ink-stand with a flourish, hurl the painful pen into the remotest corner of the room, and with an extensive stretch of relief and ~~drawiness~~, we bid you farewell.

THE END
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